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CHRIST
AND
CHRISTIAN LIFE.

LESSONS PREACHED IN ZION CHURCH, BRANTFORD.
1875.

BY THE
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PREFATORY NOTE.

The sermons in this volume have been issued from month to month during the year. For the most part they treat of Christian faith and practice. It is earnestly hoped that, under God's blessing, they may be found useful beyond the limits of the congregation, for whose benefit they were in the first instance prepared.

Brantford, January, 1876.

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CHRIST CRUCIFIED.

"I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ and Him crucified.—1st Corinthians. 2nd and 2nd.

"Christ in you the hope of glory; whom we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.—Collosians 1, v. 27, 28."

The saving truths of the gospel, and the methods to be employed in bringing them to bear upon the hearts of men, are the same in our day as in the Apostolic Age. What Paul preached and wrote to the early churches must constitute the great theme of the Christian ministry, to the end of time. Men may change, and empires may crumble into dust, but the word of the living God, like its Author, remains infallible and unchangeable. Its pure precepts, its high toned morality, and its *full* and free salvation, through a crucified Redeemer, are all adapted to meet the wants of men. Not less so are the means to be used in bringing the gospel into contact with human souls. The form, the style, the impassioned earnestness of the most gifted sons of genius, are all to be held subordinate to a higher power. These are to be coveted, but simply as instrumentalities,—in themselves worthless for the end in view. Not on the enticing words of man's wisdom are ministers to depend for success in their pulpit labours, but

on the power and demonstration of the Spirit, so that the faith of their hearers may stand, not in the wisdom of man, but in the power of God.

These truths are clearly brought out in the passages read. The Apostle gives us in brief compass, *the matter, the method, and the end of his preaching*. Fully convinced that preaching in itself is foolishness, but that it has pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe, he made no attempt to substitute human learning for divine enlightenment. Writing to the Corinthians, he says: "I came to you, not with excellency of speech or wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. My speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the spirit and power." In other words, he did not mould his preaching according to the rules of polished rhetoric, or the philosophic schools of the age in which he lived. He came as the bearer of God's message to a sinful world, holding up high above every form of science or deduction of human reason, the cross of calvary, as the hope of guilty man. He did so, moreover, in a spirit of sincere humility. Bearing in mind his own personal unworthiness as an ambassador of Christ, and trembling under the responsibilities of his position, he avoided the mere elegancies and graces of composition, lest possibly men might be hindered from recognizing the truth itself. He desired their faith to rest upon solid doctrines, not on mere forms of speech; in the power of God, and not the mere persuasion of men.

It is well for us occasionally to compare notes with successful preachers of other days. The enquiry is not altogether needless, whether in many cases we are not forsaking the good old paths, both in respect to the matter and the method of our preaching, and substituting theories and

devices other than those enjoined by the word of God. Never, in the history of the Church, has there been a period when the means of grace were more abundant, and when greater opportunities for the awakening of careless ones presented themselves, and yet our measure of success seems poor and insignificant. Let us not murmur at the withholding of God's spirit, or the deadness of our congregations, before we have examined the record of our public ministry, and acquitted ourselves of blame in the sight of God and man.

All evangelical ministers, it is taken for granted, preach Christ and him crucified. Whatever differences there may be in matters of church government and discipline, and whatever variety in formulas and covenants, the great mass of christian churches recognize justification by faith as the foundation of the sinner's hope, and the only ground of his acceptance in the sight of God. Paul stands forth, in all his epistles, as the great advocate of this truth. At the very outset of his ministry in Corinth, he resolved that this should be the great burden of his discourses; not Christ simply, but *Christ crucified*; Christ as the God-man Redeemer, a bruised and bleeding Saviour, suffering for the sins of guilty men, and dying as a ransom for the lost. It was not *as a man—the most perfect man*, that ever lived—that he preached Christ. He did not simply enjoin his hearers to emulate the holy life and blameless conversation which he exemplified in the days of his humanity upon earth; but back of all this, and before all this, he held up *Christ's divinity*, as inseparable from, and giving infinite value to the atoning sacrifice of Calvary.

The same is true, still more emphatically, of his epistle to the Colossians. The gospel of which he was a minister, he characterises as "the mystery which had been hidden from past ages, but now was made manifest to the

saints; to whom God would make known, what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you the hope of glory." In other words, Christ is the theme of this gospel, and the riches of his glory, procured by his sufferings and death, the great mystery of redemption. It is this Christ, the Apostle Paul preaches, "warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus."

Notice, then, first, *the matter of Paul's preaching*. The Christ that he preached was a divine person; the same that appeared to him on the way to Damascus, and then and there set him apart to the work of the ministry. The divinity of the Saviour was plainly manifested in such an act, and what he had done for Paul he could do for others. In no portion of the Apostle's writings do we find anything that gives the least colour to the belief, that the founder of the Christian religion was inferior to God. On the contrary, he speaks of him as "the image of the invisible God," as "the first born of every creature," as by whom "all things were created," and "for whom all things were created;" as "the head of the body, the Church;" as "the beginning, the first born from the dead," and as having in all things the pre-eminence. Language is certainly without meaning, if such attributes belong to humanity. No man of candour or intelligence can for a moment believe that these are the acts of one inferior to the Divine Being. On the contrary, the voice of our common humanity, untrammelled by prejudice and unfettered by rationalistic theories, coincides with the oft-repeated declaration of scripture, that Christ was very God and very man, the fullness of the Godhead, the life and light of men.

Paul was by no means a despiser of human genius, of

mental gifts and moral endowments. Among the Greek and Roman statesmen and philosophers of his day, there were some who, as noble specimens of mere human force of character, demanded his homage and admiration. In his own person, there was perhaps the grandest combination of intellectual and emotional power the world has ever witnessed. But not for a moment did he put himself or his contemporaries on an equality with the Son of God. He was willing to stand afar off—to follow at an infinite distance, and to strip himself of all glory, that his Saviour might be exalted.

But still further. The Christ of Paul's preaching was *Jesus, the crucified*. The purity, meekness, gentleness, and long-suffering, which were so eminently conspicuous in Christ's character upon earth, were not forgotten. These he did not fail to contrast with the common-place virtues of his age, but they were not elaborated as the crowning glory of Christ's person. They formed the back ground of his glowing pictures. It was the Cross, the shame and pain of Calvary, and the agony of crucifixion, that formed the great theme of the Apostle's preaching. "God forbid," he says, in writing to the Galatians, "that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me and I unto the world." The elements in Christ's character that called forth the wondering admiration of the Apostle, were just the ones which in ordinary circumstances would fail to attract the commendation of men. Christ in his death exemplified nothing of what Greek and Roman poetry would style the Heroic : that indifference to pain and suffering that procured for their gods a name in the shrine of the immortals. The divine elements were not palpable to the common gaze—they were only recognized by his chosen and intimate disciples. He was susceptible of mortal pain—of grief and

sorrow ; terrible shadows of melancholy, almost approaching despair, seem at times to have swept across his soul, in the prospect of dissolution. The mode of his death, also, was by far the most humiliating known to any civilized nation. A crucified malefactor was regarded as deserving of no pity. To sing the praises of such an one, was as strange an occurrence as for a poet of the present day to immortalize the memory of the criminal who dies upon the scaffold. And yet this was the very part in Christ's career that the Apostle eulogizes—the cross, and the pain, and shame of Calvary.

Why, then, did the Apostle so often enlarge upon the termination of the Saviour's earthly existence, rather than the active graces of his character ? Because that, without the crucifixion of Calvary, all that preceded was vain. The world needed an example of spotless purity and infinite wisdom, but, more than this, it needed expiation for sin. It needed the shedding of blood. It needed, as the context says, "that we, who were sometimes alienated and enemies in our minds by wicked works, should be reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, and presented holy and unblameable and unreprouvable in his sight."

Once more, it is to be remarked, that the Christ of Paul's preaching was a *living, energizing force among men*. There are two ways of preaching Christ. One as a dogma or doctrine, the other as a present power ; one as a matter of history, the other as a constant omnipotent influence in society ; one as a dead Saviour lying swathed in the garments of the tomb, the other as the living Messiah, exalted to the right hand of His Father, but still ruling in the hearts of men. Christianity as a system of doctrine demands frequent presentation in the pulpit, but the mere statement of doctrine is insufficient to rouse the human soul to a sense-

of its need and danger. A dead Christ, a great fact in the world's history, must ever form the central point of our creed, but it is the living Christ that is to conquer the world. Away from the shadows of Gethsemane and Golgotha, we love to follow the risen Redeemer to yonder mountain in Galilee, where, surrounded by his disciples and just on the eve of ascension to his mediatorial throne, we hear him say: "All power is given unto me in heaven and on earth. Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, and lo! I am with you always, even unto the end of the world."

Such preaching—Christ as a divine person,—as the crucified but living Messiah, the world still needs. The noblest type of morality is never found apart from a saving belief in the atonement of the Lord Jesus. Of whatever value mere morality may be as between man and man, it is of no avail to justify the sinner before a holy God. It is only when the heart has been humbled on account of sin and the conscience quickened to a perception of its guilt that Christ is accepted. Then purity of soul and rectitude of life begins. Gospel morality is the fruit of the Holy Spirit. It takes its rise at the cross, when the sinner freed from the burden of sin, and rejoicing in a full and free pardon, consecrates his life to the service of the Saviour.

"Talk they of morals,
Oh! Thou bleeding lamb,—the best morality
Is love of Thee."

The method of Paul's preaching is next stated in our text, "Whom we preach, warning every man and teaching every man." The language indicates the earnest character of ministerial work. To preach means literally to cry aloud—to hail inconsiderate passers by—to arrest the attention of the passing throng. The preaching of that age was more

exhortatory than argumentative. It had in it more of the fiery earnestness of the impassioned orator than the solemn judicial utterances of the trained advocate. But in all circumstances, true preaching demands fervour and feeling. When the preacher's voice trembles with electric fire, and he declares the truth as one who is conscious of its overwhelming importance and the danger of continued impenitence and unbelief, he cannot fail, under God's blessing, in producing conviction. But *teaching*, as well as preaching, entered largely into the Apostle's ministry. The fundamental doctrines of our faith are presented on every occasion, in language adapted to his audience. He recognizes everywhere the importance of sound views of the nature of Christ's work, in order to consistent Christ like-lives. To enlarge the range of their spiritual vision, and give them a more decided faith, and a firmer grasp of unseen realities, was the great object of his ministry. To build them up in the truths of Christianity and render them skilled and able defenders of the faith, was the end to which all his labors were directed. Mere declamation cannot make thoughtful, devout students of Scripture. It may produce a spasmodic zeal and a fitful enthusiasm, but it cannot expand the mind or deepen conviction of the truth as it is in Christ. Finally, he *warned* as well as taught. He persuaded men in view of the terrors of the Lord. He did not teach universal salvation, and represent the Almighty as so loving and compassionate that he would never punish the sinner for wilful impenitence and unbelief. So far from this, having made offer to his hearers of a full and free forgiveness, he indicated in clear and unmistakable language the consequences of refusal. If, indeed, there are no penalties attached to unbelief, the ordinance of preaching is a mere form and nothing more. But if the threatenings of Scripture are true and as certain of fulfilment as are its promises, if the descriptions of everlasting torment are more than

figures of speech, then no ordinary sermon is complete without more or less reference to the danger of unforgiven sin. The question is not whether such statements are palatable or pleasing to the mass of men, but are they true? Does the word of God intimate the certainty of coming retribution? If it does, faithfulness to the souls of men demands that nothing be withheld.

In thus warning men to flee from the wrath to come, the Apostle Paul followed the example of Christ. In his public ministry he endeavored to enforce saving truth upon the conscience by pointed allusion to the danger of unbelief. No stronger language ever fell from the lips of men in depicting the woes and miseries of lost souls, than his. If addressed to modern congregations it would be regarded by many as beyond the limits of propriety. But the solemnity and tenderness of the speaker proved the reality of his words. The task of setting forth in all its ghastliness the dreadful doom of the impenitent must to every preacher of the gospel be far from welcome, but personal feeling must never interfere with the discharge of solemn obligations. "I charge thee before God," says the same apostle, in writing to Timothy, "and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge both the quick and the dead, at his appearing and his kingdom, Preach the Word: be instant in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long suffering and doctrine."

The end that the Apostle had in view, in thus preaching Christ and Him crucified, is stated in the closing words of the text. "*That we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.*" The perfection of the Saints is a subject often alluded to in the Apostolic writings. "This also we wish, even *your perfection.*" "Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the stature of the fulness of Christ."

"Leaving the principles of the doctrines of Christ, *let us go on unto perfection.*" The great end of preaching is thus the perfection of Christian character, and just in proportion as the preacher of the gospel keeps this fact prominently before him, will he be successful in the ministry. There is nothing like a high aim, whether it be in secular or sacred callings. A good workman dislikes above all things to put out of his hands an unfinished piece of mechanism, or a rough, unfinished model. His own credit and reputation are at stake, apart altogether from the promised recompense, and though he may never reach absolute perfection, there is no reason why he should not aim at it. An exalted view of the gospel ministry is thus a stimulant to the noblest efforts of sanctified genius. If regarded as a mere secular calling, not radically distinct from the common employments of life, what incentive is there to that high and holy aspiration, which the word of God requires in all that seek the office? Or if it is regarded as demanding nothing more than the outward reformation of men—the maintenance of morality and the conservation and recognition of civil law, why the mental anxiety and sore travail which have universally characterised the most eminent servants of God in ancient and modern times? Such erroneous views of the ministry would fill the church with a race of hirelings and banish vital piety from the membership. But when a minister like Paul realizes that his work is grand and noble beyond conception; that he is engaged under the spirit of God in polishing corner stones for the living temple; in training minds for the highest exercises and employments of heaven; and that in proportion as he is faithful and earnest in his calling will be the eternal happiness of countless souls throughout eternity; he can well afford to despise all other callings however, lucrative and honorable, and magnify his own as more excellent than all.

This view of the Christian ministry, where honestly held, will have two effects. It will enlist the highest culture, the most extensive learning and the highest character and attainments in aspirants for the office. Be the numbers few or many, that the preacher addresses, he is engaged in a work whose importance cannot be over estimated. The crowning work of a past creation was man complete in God's image; the crowning work of the new creation is man restored and perfected in the likeness of God. It will also deepen the sense of personal responsibility in the hearers. That they may eventually be presented faultless, without wrinkle, spot or any blemish before the throne on high, is the grand aim of the ministry. "For what is our hope, our joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming."

"*Perfect in Christ Jesus!*" It is hard to realize that creatures so vile and guilty can ever attain such a height of holiness. Faultless, not simply in the judgment of men, but in the eyes of Him whose gaze no secret sin, however small, can evade. Try to realize the scene as painted by a master hand. "See, the light is flashing—that strange and searching light—searching even in that land where there is no darkness at all—it is flashing in the court of heaven. It is the presence of God's glory. The Father is on his throne, and on his right hand is the triumphant Son; and in the light's full glare a mortal stands whom the Son has been presenting to the Father—once darkened, once alienated, once sinful; but now washed, sanctified and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the spirit of our God; and the last test is come upon him, the light is shining vertical, full, cloudless, upon his soul, and he blanches not. He is not servile, for the son has made him a king. Erect and unabashed, even under the pressure of the searching light he stands, and there shines out

from him the image of the heavenly, and God the father looks upon him and sees the likeness perfect and pronounces it very good, and the Son, smiling upon the spirit he has redeemed, says, "faultless in the presence of God's glory," and it is caught up by ten thousand voices, and it swells through the azure field, until all Heaven shares the gladness and rejoices with exceeding joy. Presented *perfect in Christ Jesus!*

O, then the glory and the bliss,
When all that pained or seemed amiss
Shall melt with earth and sin away!
When Saints beneath their Saviour's eye,
Filled with each other's company,
Shall spend in love th' eternal day.

NO REST ON EARTH.

Arise ye and depart for this is not your rest.—Mich. 2nd, v. 10.

There remaineth, therefore, a rest for the people of God.—Hebrews 4th, v. 9.

The text read from the old Testament, refers to the impending judgments of God upon Judah and Samaria for their sins. The prophet Micah was a contemporary of Isaiah and Hosea, and testified against the gross wickedness that prevailed in both kingdoms, which led to the dispersion of the one and the captivity of the other. In his prophesy he foretells the doom of both, but intimates the ultimate restoration of the latter to their own land, and the subsequent advent and reign of Messiah. Canaan for many years was held up before the Israelites as their rest; a place where undisturbed by invading enemies and secure against danger, they should peacefully enjoy the labor of their hands, and the rich products of the earth. But such, because of their sins, it failed to be. In just recompense for their evil doings, recorded in the previous chapter, God declares in the text that they should go forth from this pleasant land, which has become defiled and polluted by their presence. Canaan, which was designed to be a rest for them after their wanderings in the wilderness, should be so no longer. And therefore, says the prophet, "prepare for a change of habitation, for trials more bitter and prolonged than the desert, for exile in a foreign land and under

heathen rulers, where you shall have leisure to reflect upon past mercies and undeserved goodness." "Arise ye and depart, for this is not your rest."

The Jews, from the earliest periods of their history, whether we regard them as individuals or as a nation, have been constant wanderers. To Abram the Lord said: "Get thee out of thy country and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee." A pilgrim and a stranger he continued to be, until after many changes of fortune, the good old patriarch was gathered to his people, and laid side by side with his beloved Sarah in the cave of Macpelah. And what was true of Abram was more or less true of Isaac and Jacob and their immediate descendants. They sojourned in the land of promise as in a strange country, and at last died in faith of securing a permanent dwelling far beyond the changing scenes and sorrows of the present. "They embraced the promises, they confessed that they were pilgrims and strangers on the earth, and looked for a city which hath foundations whose builder and maker is God."

If we follow onwards the history of the nation the same thing is true. Settled comfortably in the land of Goshen, surrounded by numerous flocks and herds, no longer a few isolated and dependent families, but a strong and prosperous nation, the command again comes, "Arise ye and depart for this is not your rest." Just as soon as they began to feel at home in Egypt and cling to its well watered pasture grounds as a satisfying portion, the severity of their taskmasters was increased, until they gladly embraced the proffered march through the desert. As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings," so the Lord stirred up his chosen people, in the midst of their ease and affluence, and led them forth to the land of

Canaan. For forty years their life was a daily pilgrimage. If they halted for a season upon the march, it was only to gather strength and receive instructions as to future wanderings. And although after their settlement in Canaan they enjoyed a permanency of abode unknown in the wilderness, they were constantly reminded that not even Canaan was their home. It was but the type of that perfect rest reserved in Heaven for all God's children, whether Jew or Gentile; whether the natural or spiritual descendants of Abraham; whether living under the old or new dispensation. That the earthly Canaan was understood to be nothing more than symbolical of the heavenly, is clearly proved by the language of the Psalmist. "I am a stranger with thee and a sojourner, as all my fathers were. I am a stranger in the earth; hide not thy laws from me. Thy statutes have been my song in the house of my pilgrimage." So spake King David at the time of the nation's greatest prosperity and his own exaltation and honour. And when upon his death-bed he committed to his son Solomon the government of the kingdom and the building of the temple, he added with touching pathos: "For we are strangers before thee and sojourners, as were all our fathers; our days on the earth are as a shadow and there is none abiding." And so sings the Christian now:

"I'm but a stranger here,
 Heaven is my home,
 Earth is a desert drear,
 Heaven is my home;
 Danger and sorrow stand
 Round me on every hand;
 Heaven is my fatherland,
 Heaven is my home."

As the Jews needed to be reminded of their pilgrimage, so do we. The church of God and individual members of that church are now in the wilderness. It is a period of trial and probation, of activity and conquest. But soon

the warfare shall be ended and the victory complete, when the glorious company of the Redeemed shall enter upon the rest and rewards of the heavenly Canaan. "The ransomed of the Lord shall return and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away." And yet how seldom do we realize that that we are pilgrims? We can scarcely deny the ever-changing and uncertain tenure of our life, brought as we are from day to day, to look upon the dying and gaze upon the dead. But what impression after all is left upon our minds? A few commonplace utterances about the shortness of life; the rehearsal of well-known passages of Scripture, that speak of our days as few and fleeting; and the exhibition of unusual solemnity at times when death is brought near to our doors or into our families; does not this comprehend all that most men feel in regard to this grand fact? Where are those yearnings after immortality—those longings after Heaven—those ardent hopes and aspirations for eternal habitations, that should gladden the hearts and inspire the lives of those who are soon to enter upon an existence coeval with eternity!

Now, what was taught the Jew by figure and symbol, has been plainly declared in the New Testament. "Pass the time of your sojourning here in fear. I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims abstain from worldly lusts;" so writes the Apostle Peter. "Our conversation is in heaven, from whence also we look for the Saviour," so writes the Apostle Paul. The greater portion of Christ's addresses to the disciples was to the same effect. They must leave all and follow him—they must forsake father and mother, sisters and brothers, houses and lands—they must be entirely unfettered by secular cares and worldly estates. The meaning of such language is plain. The Christian's life in the

present world is short, uncertain, unabiding. *It is a transition state as opposed to fixity or continuance of abode.* It is a mere sojourn—a passing through—a lodging for a night, and then passing on. The transient visitor only waits long enough in the town or city, as may suffice to transact his business. He has little time to spend in pleasure, in mere formality, in sight seeing or leisurely pursuits. He has no special interest in the concerns of the place, and no desire to become acquainted with the inhabitants. If through force of circumstances his stay is lengthened to weeks or months, the longing after home becomes intense. *It is also a state of active labor as opposed to rest.* That labor is described under different names. It is a race—a warfare—a wrestling; the continued exercise of all the energies of body and mind—the manifestation of unflagging zeal and devotion in the cause of Christ. The Christian is sent into the world for a definite purpose. He is to accomplish a certain amount of work and render a specified service. Not until every obligation has been fulfilled and every duty discharged can he retire from the field of action. Then death comes, changing the relations of the believer to the world and translating him to the unwearying and invigorating activities of Heaven; then comes the welcome summons, “Arise ye and depart for this is not your rest.”

Such I think is the proper view to take of life. We are neither unduly to magnify our present employments, nor unreasonably to despise them. A man may be a pilgrim and yet accomplish a vast amount of practical good for the world. The average limit of human existence is short, but if usefully spent may be prolific in noble needs. Any view of life that has a tendency to cramp the energies and sadden the spirit is false and unscriptural. We must beware of such erroneous and gloomy conceptions of the present

world. It has many drawbacks—many trials and disappointments, but after all it is just what is needed for the trial of our faith and the perfection of our graces. We are not unduly to love the world, nor be conformed to it, nor regard it as the great end of existence, but we are not on the other hand to go about complaining of its providential appointments, as if in its social arrangements, it failed to come up to the design of its maker. Nor are we to regard the employments of the present as despicable. They are part of God's grand purpose for elevating our race to a higher state of purity than it has yet attained. The hard and continuous toil of the Israelites in the desert, prepared them for the occupation of Canaan and the building of the temple, and every duty honestly discharged prepares us for the nobler pursuits of heaven. I think that just in proportion as a man rationally enjoys the present state of existence, will he be the more resigned to leave it; not because he has a low estimate of its capabilities, but because in diligently occupying the present he has attained to a nobler conception of the future. He is not wearied of life's work, but he looks forward to labor of another kind, that shall tax his spiritual energies to their utmost limit.

There are many people who go about their daily employments as if they were committing sin. Their entire conversation is about this "miserable world," its unsatisfying character, its hardships and its drudgery. They speak in a whisper, they never smile—they go about with hanging heads and rueful countenances—they avoid the society of their fellow men and take no interest whatever in the affairs of state and those great movements in behalf of humanity, that command the thoughtful intelligence of the world. They have not a single word of hope or cheer for the toiling masses; not a single ray of sunshine is seen either in their

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countenances or their dwellings. Their idea of pilgrimage is complete seclusion from everything that is secular; their endeavor is to glide through life without exposure to the shocks and agitations which unsettle other men, and thus attain a measure of angelic sweetness, unknown and impossible to imperfect beings. All this is foolish and unscriptural. Saints are not made after such a fashion. It is by the steady development of all our powers; by contact with what is often repulsive and distasteful; by enthusiastic perseverance in well doing; by the expansion of our knowledge in every direction—in material, in social, in moral and religious departments, that we are to honour the Almighty and benefit our own souls. A man is just as much a pilgrim who is earnest in his business and gathers wealth, and enjoys lawful pleasures, as were the bareheaded, unshaved and unshod Monks of old, who walked abroad clad in haircloth, with staff in hand and the mark of the cross upon their forehead. If men are not prepared to leave this world, from the store and counting house, they cannot be fitted for the great change by the austerities of monastic life. The road to heaven is just as short from the market place as from the church!

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The spirit of the text is therefore neither understood nor obeyed by assuming an isolated position in society, and despising the many blessings that heaven confers upon us in our present state of pilgrimage. What it does teach, is, that this life is not the whole of existence—nay, that it is but the smallest part; and that all our engagements are to be entered upon and carried on with a view to another and a higher state of being, where we shall find employments adapted to our fully developed powers. This world is a sphere of preparation and soul culture, more than perfect enjoyment. It is related to the future as the seed is to the flower—as the acorn

is to the oak—as the babe is to the full grown man. Up to a certain measure, we are to be contented with our present surroundings, but never to lose sight of the glorious inheritance that is in reserve. Christianity enjoins contentment, but it also requires an active faith in the future. Destitute of all aspirations after immortality and with no desires after something grander and better than our present heritage, we cannot experience that state of mind, which makes a man gladly welcome death as the consummation of his dearest hopes. If the present satisfies our wants; if we have no throbbings and pulsations after more imperishable riches than earth affords; if we look upon existence in this world as a completed thing; if friends and business and tangible realities have such a fascination, as to make us wholly indifferent in regard to better things, then we are not pilgrims,—we are unfitted for that change of occupation, companionship and citizenship which awaits the child of God.

It is not good for a man too frequently to anticipate death, if it unfits him for the active duties of life. But to ignore all thought of death from day to day and strive to banish the very idea of eternity from the mind is the extreme of madness. To follow the remains of companions and friends day after day to the grave and yet never put the question “am I ready for the change?” is surely inconceivable folly. And yet my hearers, how many of you seriously and habitually anticipate the hour of your departure? When you closed your stores last evening and balanced up the business transactions of the week, did it strike you, that possibly you would never again enter them; never again stand at your desk, or behind your counter, and that ere the beginning of another week, you might be called to render the account of life and balance

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affairs with your maker ? That time will come. To you it will be the last message from heaven and to me the last sermon. Supposing then, that the marching orders came thus suddenly and unexpectedly, what are your feelings in prospect of death and judgment ? Are you willing to depart ? Are you waiting for the call ? Have you a well grounded assurance, that whatever be the character of your closing moments, all shall be well with you in the eternal state ? Can you joyfully say :

“ This is not my place of resting,
 Mine's a city yet to come,
 Onwards to it I am hasting
 On to my eternal home.
 Soon we pass the desert dreary,
 Soon we bid farewell to pain,
 Never more be sad or weary,
 Never, never, sin again.

“ There remaineth therefore a rest for the people of God.” *Not indolent repose or selfish indulgence.* We must not think of heaven as akin to the paradise of Mahomet, where the faithful enjoy every pleasure that can gratify the senses, and where reclining upon silken couches, in bowers of resplendent beauty, and surrounded by costliest luxuries, eternity is dreamed away in unprofitable reverie. Heaven is a place of unceasing activity, where God's servants serve him day and night ; where all the powers of the glorified are engaged in themes adapted to their enlarged capacities, without weariness or exhaustion. The most studious and gifted intellects, soon tire of prolonged application. The eye becomes dim, the cheek becomes pale, the hair prematurely grey, and the brow deeply furrowed, in proportion as the mind is enriched and the sphere of human thought extended. But not so in the future state. Mind will not only be purified, but intensified. Age after age will but add new strength to the redeemed intellect and

disclose new wonders to the eye. The rest of heaven is action, but destitute of the langour that is associated with present toil.

What then is this rest? *It is rest from sin.* Not only before, but after conversion, sin retains a wonderful mastery over us. It opposes every holy resolution and vitiates every pure desire. Soul sick, because sin sick, the despairing believer cries out "who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" Sin has changed the world into a very battle ground, and man's soul into a broken, tuneless and discordant harp. But in heaven it has no place. There all is perfect purity and harmony. "As the needle in the compass, after many tremulous vibrations, at last settles in steady repose in the direction of its pole, so the redeemed spirit—all its tremblings and faintings and fitful aberrations at an end, shall remain with its refined energies, its ennobled powers and purified aspirations, undeviatingly fixed and centered on Jehovah himself." *It is rest from suffering and sorrow.* "God shall wipe all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain." Life to many is a scroll of lamentation, written within and without. The gleams of sunshine that light up the dark chambers of the soul are few and fleeting. Under the chastising rod "we go on repeating our cries, telling and retelling our afflictions, and wearying with these the kindest ears. Friendship gets worn out by our lamentations—love feels itself giving way, sympathy becomes useless and the springs of the human heart dry up." But all this changes when the eye closes upon the world. We leave all that is mortal and painful with the mouldering tabernacle in the grave. The night of weeping becomes the morning of joy, and the disembodied spirit enters upon an existence, untroubled as it

is sinless. The very remembrance of earthly tribulation shall fade from the memory, like the confused impressions of dream land, that are forgotten amid the activities of the returning day. No cry of sorrow, no sense of pain, no outbursts of anguish, disturb the lasting peace and calm of heaven. Finally, *it is rest from all worldly anxiety and care.* Physical toil is no longer demanded, nor the mind tortured by dark forebodings of poverty and want. The christian's home in glory, is not only his father's purchased possession, but it is furnished with everything necessary for the highest welfare. In the heart filled with God's presence, there is no room for anxious thoughts.

If such is the rest prepared for Gods spiritual Israelites, surely in the Apostles words, "to depart and be with Christ is far better." Christian fellowship on earth is sweet, but it is neither pure nor permanent. We miss many faces that once greeted us in the sanctuary. We long to meet them and to share their blessedness. To the sincere christian the thought of such reunion should be a joyful anticipation. Were our hearts turned and tuned as they should be to the harmony of heaven ; if we could but reach that state of perfection in this present life, when the wings of faith and love expanded, makes the soul feel restless in its prison house of clay, we would rejoice in the thought of freedom, and count the remaining days of our earthly pilgrimage long and toilsome. There have been such saints. To them dying was but going home—the grave the pathway to glory—the cold sweat of expiring nature but the dew drops of paradise,—the closing of the natural eye, but the opening of celestial vision ! What christian indeed, but feels that at best, this world is but the crucible to refine and purify his nature, and restore him to the image of his maker. This is but the workshop of his

mental powers—a school of preparation for something better—all that he can attain on earth is but the rudiments of heavenly knowledge. The fuller development of the mysteries of grace, is reserved for the eternal world.

Thus assured that there remains such a rest for the people of God, and that the rest will be all the sweeter in proportion to the loving service rendered here, let us not spend our few remaining years, in vain regrets and melancholy musings over opportunities of usefulness and seasons of privilege neglected. "The night is far spent—the day is at hand; let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light." Let us "walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil."

"Brethren, arise,
Let us go hence!
Death and the grave are here,
The sick-bed and the bier.
The children of the tomb
May love this kindred gloom;
But we, the deathless band,
Must seek the deathless land.

"Brethren arise,"
Let us go hence!
This is not our abode
Too far, too far from God.
What are earth's joys and gems?
What are its diadems?
Our crowns are waiting us
Within our father's home.
Our friends above the skies
Are bidding us arise;
Our Lord, he calls away
To scenes of sweeter day
Than this sad earth can know.
Let us arise and go!"

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WALKING IN THE LIGHT.

"O house of Jacob, come ye, and let us walk in the light of the Lord."—Isaiah 2nd and 5th.

These words are a call to repentance and change of conduct addressed to the Jewish nation. In the opening verses of the chapter there is presented a cheering picture of Messianic times, when the church of the living God, shall attain her long predicted glory and eminence among the nations of the earth, and when the sceptre of Immanuel shall rule the world. "It shall come to pass in the last days that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it." By the expression "mountain of the Lord's house," we have first, a reference to the temple built upon Mount Moriah, which symbolised to the inhabitants the worship of the true God, and secondly, an indication of the time yet future, when the spiritual temple or house of God shall become so conspicuous, as not only to be seen by all nations, but to attract all nations to the worship of the true Jehovah. It shall then be established or fixed, beyond the reach of all possible attack from external foes, for christianity being everywhere diffused and everywhere accepted, shall rule men's hearts and conform their lives to its holy requirements. And therefore adds the Prophet, "many people shall

go and say, 'come ye and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths; for out of Zion shall go forth the Law and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.'" The "many people" include Jew and Gentile. The Heathen shall abandon their idols and shatter their altars, and embrace the gospel. The Jew having the veil of unbelief removed from his eyes, shall submit to the authority of Messiah and gladly recognise him as the promised hope of Israel and the world. From Zion the church of the living God, righteous laws shall emanate for the guidance of the nations; and finally, under the mild, but supreme government of the Prince of peace, war and bloodshed shall come to an end. "He shall judge among the nations and rebuke many people; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more."

Now, in view of this happy issue, the Prophet calls upon the Jews to begin even now the work of reformation. As they had been highly favoured beyond all other people, he would have them at once, and in advance of heathen kingdoms, exhibit that purity of conversation and holiness of life, befitting their distinguished blessings. "O, house of Jacob, come ye, and let us walk in the light of the Lord." Let us henceforth abandon false Gods—the worship of idols—the human standards and human opinions of the world—the gross sins and guilty rebellion of the past, and in simple, childlike obedience, accept the teachings of heaven. Begin a new page in your history—seek after a higher and nobler national existence—be honest in the practice of that religion and the love of that Jehovah,

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whom you have so frequently avowed as your lawgiver and king.

If such be the meaning of the passage, it has a wider application than to the Jews of old Testament times. It is addressed to all who have made profession of the christian faith. Forget the past—begin a new spiritual existence—seek to exhibit those virtues and graces that are incumbent upon the children of God, and mark the followers of the lamb.

Notice first, the reason why the church of Christ should aim at the injunction of the text. It is the coming of Christ—the realization of all those precious hopes and promises, that for ages have kept alive the faith of God's saints and stimulated them to united effort for the regeneration of the world. Whatever views are held by christians regarding the millenium and personal reign of Christ, all are agreed, in expecting that happy time, when the gospel shall rule supreme in the hearts of men and mould the laws of nations; when the hoary systems of superstition which have so long hindered the advancement of the truth shall be banished from our world; when heathen altars and statues erected to unknown and unreal Gods, shall crumble into dust and the son of righteousness arise with healing for the suffering myriads of our race.

That the arrival of such a long expected day, should be to the church of God, the perfection of joy, cannot for a moment be doubted, in view of the prayers and efforts she has put forth, for the coming of this golden age. It is true, that her prayers have neither been so fervent nor so frequent as they should have been, nor her generous benefactions equal to her resources and opportunities; nevertheless we must regard them as evidence of her earnest

longings for that time, when holiness shall be written upon the bells of the horses, and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose.

The faith of the church has in some respects been severely tested. She has waited long for indications of the dawn of morning; she has listened eagerly for the sound of the chariot wheels; she has called once and again "watchman, what of the night?" and to her cry received the answer, "The morning cometh and also the night." At times, bitter persecution and bloodshed, or spiritual deadness among professing christians, or the prevalence of unblushing vice and infidelity, have made her almost despair of the set time to favour Zion. But still she maintains her confidence in the declarations of the Scripture, that he that comes shall come and not tarry. The night of weeping may be long, but joy cometh in the morning.

Now if such be the assurance of the church, what is demanded of her? If the day of victory is drawing near, how should she prepare for it? If the bridegroom is soon to appear, how shall she stand in his presence? By aiming at the character presented in the text—"O, house of Jacob, come ye, and let us walk in the light of the Lord." Two things, I take it, are specially intended in the exhortation. *Greater holiness and greater activity.* Has the church of the present day these characteristics? There never was a period, when the machinery of the visible church was more complete, or when greater efforts were put forth, for the extension of the Redeemer's kingdom. In all the churches, there is evident progress. But do such manifestations of spiritual life, however much in advance of the past, come up to the demands of the case, and are they proportionate to the vast increase of

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error and wickedness that exists ? Are we conducting ourselves as on the eve of a mighty struggle, that shall usher in the reign of righteousness and justice for the oppressed of all nations, and emancipate humanity from its long burden of sin and sorrow ? I hardly think there is any church of Christ that will maintain that its energies are at all developed to the extent demanded. And if this is the case as regards active endeavours for the salvation of souls, it is still more apparent, as regards that holiness of life, which should characterise the evangelical churches of our land ! Where is there that separation from the world and the vain amusements of the world, which the master demands in his followers—the most powerful of all arguments in behalf of our holy religion ?

Now in view of the consummation of all things, so strikingly predicted in the context, surely the church has need of exemplifying a greater resemblance to her head. It is well to protest against error and heresy ; to utter no uncertain sound regarding the innovations of rationalism, ritualism and romanism, that are coming in like a flood, and to pray with all fervency that the man of sin may be speedily overthrown ;—but is there not a better way of attracting the world to a love of christianity, and submission to the authority of Christ ? If we could but raise the tone of the church at large, and leaven her ministers and members with greater faith and holier daring, and inspire them with something of the meekness and gentleness which characterised the son of God when in the world, would she not accomplish more than in the arena of warfare, where her graces are so apt to become polluted and her garments to be soiled ?

The question then is pertinent, what are we doing as

churches, to bring about the happy time spoken of by the Prophet? We believe that it is to be hastened by human agency. How then would we wish ourselves employed when the master calls and our conduct comes under the review of the omniscient Jehovah? Surely not as idle, indifferent, and listless spectators of events, or as servants who have hid their Lord's talents in the earth, but rather as good stewards of the mysteries of the kingdom;—"blameless and harmless, the sons of God without rebuke in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, holding forth the word of life."

But the text is equally applicable to individual members of the church. "Come ye, and let us walk in the light of the Lord." To walk is to live, to act, to conduct ourselves according to the purity and simplicity which the Bible inculcates. The light of the Lord, is the revelation of his will. The Apostle Paul uses such language, when he enjoins the members of the early churches "to walk in newness of life—not after the flesh, but after the spirit." "Ye were sometimes darkness," he says, "but now are ye light in the Lord—walk as children of light and have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness." There can be no mistaking the meaning of such words. It implies a change of life—a revolution of feeling—the deliberate choice of another and higher standard of conduct than is common to the world. The world is still in darkness, but Christ, as the light of the world, has come to banish the darkness. Our actions are therefore to be in keeping with the character of his mission.

Now were I to put the question to every individual hearer of the gospel—what is the standard of your conduct—how are you endeavouring to live—what are your aims? would

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the unanimous response be, We are walking in the light of the Lord? I fear it much. Some walk as they tell us, by the light of nature. They seek no higher monitor, and need no more infallible guide. The material universe, with its silent voice proclaims to them with unmistakeable clearness their duty and their destiny. In the stars above them, in the landscape at their feet and in the roar of the tempest, they recognise a presiding Deity, and have all they need for the guidance of their life!

We do not despise the teachings of nature. To the trained eye of the child of God, she reveals the beauty and goodness of the great Creator. The wisdom and unchanging faithfulness of the Almighty maker of the universe, shine forth in all his works. But apart from the page of inspiration, nature is at best, a blind and uncertain guide. It is only as interpreted by the spirit of God that her teachings profit. It is only in so far as her revelations coincide with the higher revelation of heaven, that she is of any value to men in the practical affairs of life. The man who attempts to live by the light of nature, is a greater fool, than he who attempts to navigate the ocean without chart or compass, or the man who dives into subterranean caverns without safety lamp to direct his steps and protect him from the dangers and poisonous vapors that infest the darkness! Nature has done much for man, but not in the sphere of civilization or morals. The arabs of the desert, destitute of christian culture, are wild, uncivilized, and savage, living by plunder and cherishing revenge. And although we do not charge such crimes against men in christian lands, who profess to have no higher guide than the light of nature, we fearlessly assert, that their virtues cannot compare with those of their fellowmen who follow the unerring dictates of heaven. Nature without a God,

offers no restraint whatever to the passions—the cupidity, the avarice and corruption of the unregenerate heart.

There are others, who walk by the light of reason and boast of their intellectual superiority to their fellowmen. The grace of faith has no place in their creed. Human testimony they can credit, but the divine word they ignore. They believe that right and wrong are so manifest, that there is no need for supernatural guidance. With proud contempt they look down upon simple minded christians, who seek something better than human counsel. They feel quite secure in following the promptings of their own judgment, which in no case has as yet deceived them. In a word, they deny the existence of a divine revelation, and regard the old and new Testament scriptures as unworthy of acceptance by intelligent men!

Now what we have said regarding those who walk by the light of nature, is equally applicable to modern rationalists who have no higher guide than the inner sense. Reason within certain limitations is a noble mental endowment. Its powers are varied and far-reaching. But reason is absolutely helpless regarding the more important questions that perplex the mind and cannot satisfy the deep yearnings of humanity. It sheds but a feeble light upon the dark inscrutable providences of the present life, or those awfully mysterious problems that succeed the gloom and darkness of the grave.

But there are many good men, who govern their conduct by the light of conscience and think they cannot err, so long as they follow such a faithful monitor. There never was a greater mistake. Conscience in some men is the very embodiment of oppression and injustice. When un-

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enlightened by the spirit of God, it drives men to the commission of the most flagrant crimes. All men have conscience, and yet do men always act as if directed by an infallible guide? You tell me that men reject the warnings of conscience and hence their remorse for unlawful and unrighteous deeds ;—but what shall we say of the thousands who act in accordance with the dictates of conscience, and never experience any sense of wrong-doing, though daily violating the law of God ?

Conscience when enlightened by the spirit is an eminently safe guide, for then it is but the reflex of heavens mandates. But for every such conscience in the world, there are hundreds unimpressible and indifferent to the sanctions of morality. And therefore, when men speak of walking by the light of conscience, everything depends upon the kind of conscience. Is it a good conscience such as Paul speaks of, or a conscience seared as with a hot iron? It is no index to a man's character that he walks by the light of conscience, unless it is instructed by the teachings of scripture.

Now it is one thing to admit the folly of walking by the light of nature, or reason, or conscience, but another thing to obey the exhortation of the text. It was not for want of knowledge of the true God, that the Jews so frequently lapsed into idolatry and preferred darkness to light, and so at the present day, many professing christians, taught by sad experience their own helplessness and ignorance, refuse the "light of the world," whose beams are for the healing of the nations.

To walk in the light of the Lord, is a precept of universal application in all the details of life. It does not mean

simply an acknowledgement of God in the ordinances of religion, but the giving up of our entire life to the control of heaven. It implies a daily recognition of his presence—a consciousness that his eye is ever upon us in the discharge of our varied duties. It presumes that we can ask the Almighty to investigate our motives, and that we are not afraid to bring them to the test of Gods word. Walking in the light of the Lord, implies, habitual dependence upon Gods goodness—a looking to him at all times for direction, and a fear of offending him, whose favour is more than life and whose loving kindness is better than silver and gold. Only so far as we thus walk in the light of the Lord can we expect success, whether in temporal or spiritual matters. The many mishaps and unexpected reverses we encounter, are due to the fact that we trust to our own wisdom which is foolishness and are guided by the feeble flickering light of our reason, rather than the steady light of Gods law and testimony.

If then we would as christians enjoy greater peace and inward joy, let us quit dependence upon human counsel, and betake us to that fountain of light, in which alone we can see clearly. Says the Psalmist, "With thee is the fountain of light, and in thy light we shall see light," "Thy word is a light unto my path and lamp unto my feet." Any other conduct in Godschildren is unbecoming. What communion hath light with darkness? O house of Jacob, come ye, and let us walk in the light of the Lord."

There is affectionate entreaty in the language of my text. It is the kind parent, mourning over an ignorant and erring child, and yearning after his restoration. "Come—return ;—give up your foolish and unprofitable wanderings in forbidden paths ; cease trusting to your own weak and

imperfect endeavours ; rest in the arms of my love and trust in the sincerity of my promises." There is no word of rebuke—no mention of past misdeeds—no threats of coming retribution. Only come and all will be forgiven and forgotten. It is thus that the Almighty recalls his backsliding children, who have slighted his love and are living indifferent to his claims.

Conscious of many short comings in the past, we call on you to-day, to seek after a nearer and closer walk with God. How can we better begin a new period of existence, than by resolving hence forward to walk in the light of the Lord. We cannot err if we thus live. We may have our full share of trials, but they shall minister to our good. We may meet with many disappointments, but they cannot endanger our heavenly possessions. We may be called as the year advances to look into the grave, as we commit to its cold embrace the dear ones of our homes, but the light of heaven shall give to it supernatural radiance and angelic forms in shining raiments shall rebuke our fears. We may ourselves pass away to that land of eternal day, where shadows never flit across the vision, and where the brightness of the lamb dispels all gloom and darkness. How can we better prepare for such a wondrous change, than by adopting as our daily motto the words of the text, " walk in the light of the Lord."

At this season of the year we are called to friendly greetings for each others welfare. It is a time of joy in many homes—in some mingled with tears and sorrow. Ah ! the brightest thought connected with new year seasons, lies in the knowledge, that we are drawing near that land of unsullied purity and perfect happiness, where we shall see face to face and know as we are known. Our path on

earth is often dreary. Even with the light of Gods favour streaming full upon us, we feel lonely and far from home. But the journey shall soon end, and the dangers of the darkness be over.

"A child of light am I ;
My way I cannot, cannot miss ;
And yet the goal I scarce desery
In blinding darkness such as this.

Oh, Lord, the world is dark !
But thou art only, only light,
Its sun is but a dying spark
But thou art ever, ever bright."

How good to know that the light of the world can never be extinguished ! It shall continue to shine on, until every land is wrapt in its effulgence. And so in a less degree should be the life of every christian. You cannot shine so brightly, but you can reflect the glory of the sun of righteousness. "Among whom ye shine as lights in the world" says the apostle. As lighthouses are placed on rock bound coasts to warn seamen of the dangers of shipwreck, so are christians in a dark and dreary world. Said a traveller to the keeper of the Calais lighthouse, "But what if one of your lights should go out at night ?" "Never—impossible, he replied. Sir yonder are ships sailing to all parts of the world. If to-night one of my burners were out, I should hear from America or India, saying that on such a night, the lights at Calais lighthouse gave no warning, and some vessel had been wrecked. Ah, Sir, sometimes I feel, when I look upon my lights, as if the eyes of the whole world were fixed upon me. Go out ! Burn dim ! Never ! impossible !" What a lesson in these words for every child of God. According as his character is luminous—clear—truth revealing, or dark, suspicious, and contradictory, may he be the means of saving or damning some

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poor soul that is struggling against temptation and ready to be dashed upon the rocks of perdition.

Those to whom these words were first addressed did not value the light, and now the scattered members of the Jewish nation, wander here and there, aliens from the commonwealth—without the knowledge of a Saviour and the hope of pardon through his merits. Their light has been changed into darkness and how great is the darkness! Are we like them indifferent to our privileges? do we neglect the house of prayer? do we despise the ministrations of the sanctuary? If so, their terrible fate, may soon be ours. Where to-day the once highly favoured churches of Asia? Where the cities where Christ wrought his mighty works and spake such wonderful words? They are blotted out of existence, with scarcely a memento left behind to tell of their former greatness. The light of the sun performs its mission in the world of nature and so must the gospel. If not here, its cheering life giving beams shall enlighten other lands, and lead the heathen to the cross!

A LAMB FOR A BURNT OFFERING.

"Behold the fire and the wood; but where is the lamb for the burnt offering? My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering."—Genesis, 22nd, v. 7-8.

Isaac could have asked no question more natural or appropriate. He had long been taught that without a victim there could be no sacrifice, and without the shedding of blood there could be no remission of sin. It seemed strange that his father should make every other preparation needful in the circumstances, but that the most important element of all should be forgotten. The altar, the wood, the fire and the knife were but of secondary importance. Unless there was a lamb for a burnt offering, the journey to Mount Moriah was in vain.

That Isaac knew nothing from his father's conversation of the burnt offering designed by command of God, is evident. Perhaps the answer to the question may have suggested the mysterious nature of the sacrifice. But the patriarch's heart was too full, and his feelings too solemn to enter into any minute details at this trying moment, or tell his son of the terrible fate that soon awaited him. Nothing, indeed, but the strongest faith could have sustained him in this act of obedience to the decree of heaven. There were many cogent reasons that Abraham might have pled for refusing to slay his son. Had not the

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Almighty declared, with all the solemnity of an oath, that murder was the most atrocious of crimes, and that "whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed."? In this case how much more aggravated the crime, seeing that the victim was his only beloved son, one whose conduct and filial affection had endeared him to his parents, and gained for him a place in their hearts, only second to the love they bore to God himself. Moreover, the deed of blood was to be consummated without the knowledge of his wife. Not until the body of her son was burned to ashes would she be made acquainted with her sad bereavement, and realize that the murderer was the companion of her life and the father of her child. From a human point of view, everything was against the commission of such a crime, and seemed to justify disobedience to the command of God.

But, added to these considerations of mere flesh and blood, if Isaac is to die what of the promises made to Abraham, that in his seed all nations of the earth should be blessed—that kings should come out of his loins, and that in Isaac, and not Ishmael, God's covenant should be established throughout all generations? Long before his birth he was declared the heir of promise. Abraham and Sarah had comforted themselves with the thought that this son of their old age should not only be the stay and consolation of their declining years, but would perpetuate their name and memory through a long line of princes, and, finally, that the Messiah himself should descend from the father of the faithful. Were all these visions of grace and glory now to vanish? Was the Almighty only mocking and deceiving them with hopes and expectations, that were never intended to be realised? Better far, in such a case, never to have had a son to comfort them, or promises of a

long line of descendants, more numerous than the stars of heaven, if, at the moment when their fulfilment seemed most certain, they should be hopelessly destroyed !

But such objections had no weight with Abraham. He never hesitated for a moment. He expressed no reluctance. He did not even ask the Almighty for an explanation of this strange procedure. We cannot doubt that serious thoughts filled his mind all through this crisis ; but never for a moment did they interfere with his cheerful obedience to the will of heaven. There is no delay whatever in carrying out to the very letter the orders given. Mount Moriah is far distant, and the journey is tedious. The secret grief that for three days must fill his heart unknown to any other human being, and the thought of walking side by side with his son who is all unconsciously the prepared victim for the altar, are so many additional ingredients in his cup of woe. "If I must make the sacrifice, why not now—why not here? Why not make known to Isaac by divine revelation the will of heaven that he must die, and thus prepare him for the ordeal?" No such feelings find expression upon the lips of Abraham. His faith must be tested, not merely by sacrificing Isaac, but by the mode of sacrifice indicated by God. For when men are called to surrender the nearest and the dearest, it must be in his appointed way, and not according to their own preferences. And right nobly did the patriarch's faith rise to the height of the emergency. Early in the morning he arose and saddled his ass, clave the wood, and with the intended victim for the burnt offering, hastened to the appointed place. That there may be no possible interference with his purpose, when Mount Moriah looms up in the distance, he leaves behind the two young men, and

with Isaac climbs the mountain side. The artless, touching enquiry of his son, "Behold the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?" does not in the least make him falter. Leaving it with God to provide a substitute for his son, or equally willing that in the person of his son the lamb for the burnt offering may be found, he answers, "My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering." Nay, not until the recalling voice of the Almighty is heard does he desist from the bloody deed. The altar is made, the wood laid thereon, his son bound and placed upon the altar and the knife outstretched to slay the victim when his faith, now fully tested, receives its reward. "Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou anything unto him, for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me." But where, we ask, is the lamb for the burnt offering. Behold, behind him there is a ram caught in a thicket by the horns! No wonder that the rapturous joy that filled the patriarch's soul gave a new name to that hallowed spot—"Jehovah Jireh—the Lord will provide."

"The saints should never be dismayed,
Nor sink in helpless fear;
For when they least expect his aid,
The Saviour will appear.

This Abraham found; he raised the knife,
God saw, and said "Forbear!
Yon lamb shall yield his meaner life—
Behold the victim there."

Now, what was the nature of this faith so conspicuously displayed in Abraham? Was it simply that unquestioning obedience which every child of God is bound to render, even when the command is absolute and unconditional? Was it a firm belief in the wisdom of God's command, although undiscoverable by human reason?—that

all things work together for good to them that love God, and that our severest calamities and our sorest bereavements may be our greatest blessings? There can be no doubt but that there were these elements in Abraham's faith, but there was *much more than these*. The apostle throws light upon this interesting point in the epistle to the Hebrews, where he says, "By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac; and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said that in Isaac shall thy seed be called; accounting that God was able to raise him from the dead, from whence also he received him in a figure." These words describe not only the character and strength of Abraham's faith, but the object of his faith. He recognized the power of God to raise his son from the dead, and believed, notwithstanding his being offered in sacrifice, that all the promises referring to him and to his seed would be literally fulfilled. This faith in God's power to raise Isaac from the dead may mean one of two things, or both. It may mean that he believed that by a miracle, akin to that of the resurrection of Lazarus, his son would be restored to him, or that at the last day, in company with the dust of sleeping saints, the glorified body should rise and take its place at God's right hand. The latter belief is most consistent, and worthy of the glowing eulogium passed upon Abraham's faith by the apostle. For if Abraham was assured that his son was only for a brief season to be parted from him, and that from the ashes of the smoking altar, his body was instantly to be raised to life, there would have been little scope for the exercise of faith at all. But if we think of Abraham sacrificing his beloved son *with no prospect of reunion* until he himself had passed away to another world;—as looking forward beyond the lapse of centuries to the

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final resurrection of the just, when, according to the promise and power of God, he should awake to eternal life, we can cordially join with the apostle in describing this act of faith as one of the grandest upon record !

That Abraham, apart from the declaration of the Apostle, was acquainted with the doctrine of the resurrection, there is little reason to doubt. It was no new idea in that early age of the world. The creed of the Old Testament church demanded it, although it may not have been taught as dogmatically as with us at the present day. It was a hope that inspired the patriarchs with unspeakable comfort, when they laid in the grave the body of their friends. Pilgrims and strangers upon the earth, they looked forward to the possession of a better country, even an heavenly. Their language was that of David : " As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness ; I shall be satisfied when I awake with thy likeness. Thou wilt shew me the path of life ; in thy presence is fullness of joy ; at thy right hand there are pleasures for ever more."

But was this all that Abraham's faith laid hold of when he offered Isaac for a burnt offering at God's command ? What do we think of instinctively when we read the words " My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering. " ? Most certainly, of the lamb of God, who, in the fulness of time, should come into the world to die for guilty man. That Abraham's faith took hold of this great central truth of the gospel, in common with saints of later days, we cannot doubt. Christ, when rebuking the unbelieving Jews, contrasts their conduct with that of the Patriarch. " Your father, Abraham, rejoiced to see my day, and he saw it and was glad. " The day of Christ is his earthly existence—his manifestation in the flesh—the

entire work of redemption, from the time of the advent until dying upon the cross he finished transgression and made an end of sin. It was this day that Abraham rejoiced to see, and did see, by faith. That his spiritual vision was clearer than the mass of Old Testament saints we can well believe; that he had a more intelligent grasp of the sufferings that brought the Saviour to the cross we can easily understand, so that when standing upon Mount Moriah, and about to slay his son he thought of the time when, near that very spot, a greater tragedy was to be enacted, and blood more precious than that of Isaac to be shed by a father's hand. Yes, my hearers, the faith that instrumentally saves you saved Abraham. He rested in the merits of the atonement; his eye looked upon the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world.

There was a time in the history of our race, when we can conceive of the angels weeping over man's fall, and saying "Where is the lamb for the burnt offering?" The loud hosannas that from eternity had filled the heavenly world were silent, while justice pronounced the death knell of humanity.

"Die he or justice must; unless for him
Some other able, and as willing pay
The rigid satisfaction—death for death."

Then it was that the Son of God, "in whom the fulness dwells of love divine," offered to make atonement for man's sin. "Lo, I come in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O, my God." Thus the Father provided himself a lamb for a burnt offering.

Among evangelical christians there is perfect unanimity of opinion that Christ died for the sake of others and not for personal guilt or sin. There are, however, many false

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and unscriptural views held as to the nature of Christ's vicarious sufferings and death. In a popular discourse it is out of place to traverse the wide field of speculative theology and review the different opinions held concerning the atonement. There is one, however, of comparatively recent date, that cannot be overlooked. "Admitted," say certain writers, "that Christ's death and sufferings were vicarious and expiatory, the same principle runs through nature and human society. It is no uncommon thing to see one suffering for another, and atoning by that suffering for wrong-doing committed, not by the man himself, but by another. Substitution is not unknown in our sinful world. The mother who watches day and night by the sick bed of her child, who is stricken with a deadly plague, and lives only long enough to see her child restored, is an example of self-sacrifice. The youth who plunges into the deep to rescue his companion, and sinks to rise no more, after saving the life he loved,—and the physician who, when endeavoring to discover the secret nature of some fearful malady, dies a martyr to his heroism, *are examples of vicarious suffering*, and by such instances of wonderful affection we can understand the nature of Christ's sacrifice for guilty men."

Such language evinces but a limited knowledge of the most common facts connected with the death of Christ. His death was not only suffering for the sins of others, but *full satisfaction* for the sins of others. It was not simply absolving the sinner from the curse of a broken law, but imparting to him a righteousness, altogether beyond human power to bestow. A man may suffer for another and the law may, in certain cases, accept such substitution, but all the human suffering in the world cannot change the character of the guilty one, nor alter his standing in the

sight of God and man. But Christ's death does both. As our substitute, he not only bears our sin but renders full satisfaction to an offended Deity for our crimes; he purchases for us a full and free pardon; gives us a perfect righteousness, and renders certain our acceptance with heaven. Nor will anyone who attaches any meaning to the language of scripture, compare for a moment the terrible agonies of a dying Saviour with the sufferings of the creature. It seems almost blasphemy to whisper such a thing. We must first deny the divinity of Christ before such a comparison is reasonable, and, even then, we will find it hard to point out any similarity that gives the shadow of countenance to the theory we are now rejecting.

There can be no doubt but that Isaac was a type of Christ. The cheerful surrender of his son by Abraham, and the consecration of that son to death, symbolises the more wonderful surrender and gift of God's own son for the salvation of our race. Without insisting, as some do, that Christ was crucified on the very spot where the altar was erected for Isaac, or that he had attained the very age of the Saviour when he died upon the cross, there are many points of resemblance worthy of notice. Isaac carried the wood intended to consume his own body; Christ bare his own cross. "They took Jesus and led him away, bearing his cross. Isaac was to suffer for no special sin of his own; Christ died for no personal guilt. "He was holy, harmless and undefiled—separate from sinners. He was wounded for our transgressions; he was bruised for our iniquities—the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed." Isaac willingly submitted to the command of his father, and made no attempt to save his life. So Christ, though he had the power to rescue himself from his enemies and escape the

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supernatural agonies of the cross, cheerfully laid down his life. "Thinkest thou not that I cannot now pray to my father and he shall give me more than twelve legions of angels, but how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled?" It was by his father's hand that Isaac was to die; it was that hand that was to fire the wood and fan the consuming flames; and it was by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God the father that Christ suffered upon the accursed tree. "Thou couldst have no power at all against me," said Christ to Pilate, "except it was given thee from above." It pleased the Lord to bruise him. He put him to grief; he made his soul an offering for sin. "Awake, O, Sword, against my shepherd; against the man that is my fellow; smite the shepherd and the sheep shall be scattered." It was not the malignity of the Jews, nor the covetousness of Judas, nor the cowardice of Pilate that brought Jesus to the cross. These were but the instruments of heaven. *God provided himself a lamb for a burnt offering in the person of his own beloved son.*

It is our joy and privilege to-day to make offer of this lamb of God who taketh away the sins of the world. The death of Christ is the corner-stone of the christian faith, as the burnt offering lay at the foundation of the whole sacrificial system, and gave value to all the other rites that followed. Before we can present acceptable offerings of praise and gratitude, our souls must be sprinkled with atoning blood. The burnt offering under the old Testament economy was a perpetual sacrifice,—day by day throughout all generations the lambs were to be offered at the door of the tabernacle before the Lord. So also the efficacy of Christ's sacrifice is perpetual. He dies no more, but by his one offering for sin he has forever propitiated the wrath of God and made reconciliation between man and his

maker. The power of Christ's cross to save and to satisfy divine justice only ends with the restitution of all things. It includes both Jew and Gentile. All who feel that they are sinners and rest in simple faith upon the infinite mercy of God in Christ may enjoy its blessedness.

"Jehovah Jireh " the Lord will provide. He has provided in the past and his goodness and grace will attend us in the future. "He that spared not his own son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things." Every believer can testify to the faithfulness of God and the fulfilment of his promises. He may not therefore despond, nor dare to doubt his love. In our greatest straits deliverance is near.

" Though troubles assail,
And dangers affright,
Though friends should all fail,
And foes all unite :

Yet one thing secures us,
Whatever betide,—
The Scripture assures us,
The Lord will provide."

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FIRST LOVE.

"Thou hast left thy first love."—Revelation, 2nd, and 4th.

The history, character and destiny of the churches of Asia, have been recorded in Scripture for the instruction and warning of Christians at the present day. Prominent among the lessons taught us, is the responsibility of churches for the abuse of their religious privileges. He that walks among the seven golden candlesticks, and whose eyes are as a flame of fire, takes cognizance of their advancement or backsliding in the divine life.

The text accuses the church of Ephesus of the latter crime. It had left its first love. Its original fervor and zeal in behalf of a pure christianity had abated; its earnest maintenance of the truth had given place to indifference and mere formal respect for the ordinances of religion. Spiritual life was feeble and steadily declining: those singular gifts and graces—that pre-eminent holiness and purity of deportment, that marked its members in former years had given place to worldly-mindedness and material gratifications, inconsistent with the creed or practice of Apostolic Churches. Its glory was fast passing away—its sun was setting to rise no more.

The former history of the Ephesian church is an interesting one. No society of Christians ever gave such promise of permanence in the Lord's work, and successful endeavors to propagate a living Christianity. It was distinguished in Apostolic history, for the absence of all those heresies and irregularities, that were so common in the early churches. "It had no disorders such as troubled Corinth; no fanaticism such as had troubled Thessalonica, and no violent schisms, such as rent in twain almost every church that Paul had founded." The frequent visits of the Apostle to the Ephesian church, testify his extraordinary interest in its welfare. In his second missionary journey he came to Ephesus and reasoned with the Jews. In his third, his preaching was so awakening and convincing, and the miracles he wrought so conclusive in favor of the divine power conferred upon him as an Apostle of Christianity, that Demetrius, the silver-smith, fearing that idolatry was about to be undermined and his gains diminished and the temple of Diana abandoned, incited the mob to violence and filled the city with confusion. It was to the Elders of the Ephesian church that the Apostle gave that touching farewell address on his way to Rome, commending them to God and the word of his grace, who was able to build them up, and to give them an inheritance among all them that are sanctified. And it was to the same Ephesian church that he wrote one of the most affectionate of all his epistles in which he speaks of them, as having made no mean attainments in the Christian calling, and as being heirs with him of eternal life.

The language of that epistle is the best evidence of the high estimate formed by Paul of their spiritual attainments,

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and singularly pure and holy lives. He speaks of them as having been chosen before the foundation of the world, to be holy and without blame;—as having been sealed with the Holy Spirit—as having been quickened together with Christ—raised up and made to sit in heavenly places, and as builded together for an habitation of God through the spirit. Such language is out of place, in describing any but matured and well grounded saints. The topics discussed and the mysteries spoken of are far above the comprehension of mere babes in Christ. Such deep things of the Kingdom could only be understood by men and women elevated by the divine Spirit into communion with heaven and enriched by a personal experience of God's love. Such was the character of the primitive church of Ephesus. How sadly it had changed before the close of the first century, is indicated by the words of the text. John, in Patmos, is commissioned by the Spirit to address it words of mingled commendation and rebuke. It was yet in many respects a noble little band, but the seeds of declension and decay had been sown, and symptoms of spiritual death were clearly visible. "I know thy works and thy labor, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil; and thou hast tried them which say they are Apostles and are not, and hast found them liars; and hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast labored and hast not fainted." What church at the present day can show a fairer record? They are not charged with immorality, or idolatry, or heresy: they still maintained a bold, uncompromising attitude towards the truth, and were equally ready to testify against impostors, and to bear with patience suffering for the cause of Christ. In the estimation of men there was nothing to call forth remonstrance or cause alarm. But in spite of all these

exterior excellencies, their inner life was deteriorating. The beauty and freshness and fragrance of their first love was sullied; "the fire on their heart's altar was silently declining, and their heart's temple gradually growing dark and cold." "Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love." "Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do thy first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place."

This is the last mention of the Ephesian Church in the word of God. For its future history we must consult uninspired records. For many years it remained in a lukewarm condition. The Apostle John spent his last days among its members, preaching and exemplifying his lessons of love. Ignatius, on his way to martyrdom, commended it for its fidelity and zeal. But at last it sank into hopeless spiritual decline, and drew down upon it the fiery vengeance of heaven. All that now remains of that once gorgeous city, are a few unintelligible heaps of stones—mud cottages untenanted—fragmentary ruins—fallen temples and desecrated sanctuaries. The great city has become a desolation, and a dry land, and a wilderness; a land wherein no man dwelleth, neither doth any son of man pass by. The busy hum of a mighty population is now silent in death—the garden has become a desert. "Even the sea has retired from the scene of desolation, and a pestilential morass, with mud and rushes, has succeeded to the waters, which brought up the ships laden with merchandise from every country."

As with the Church at Ephesus, so with churches at the present day. When the mass of professing Christians in any community become languid—listless and indifferent;

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wedded to their carnal pleasures and recreant to their solemn vows, the same judgements are forthcoming, and the same dark shadows will shroud the closing pages of their history.

What then let us consider are the marks of backsliding—that perilous state of soul indicated by the words,—“thou hast left thy first love?”

Fatal backsliding in God's children is impossible. Such seems to be the testimony of Scripture. They are constantly guarded and upheld by the faithful eye and arm of heaven. “The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord; though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down: for the Lord upholdeth him with his hand.” It is however implied in this very promise of divine protection and succour, that a christian may temporarily backslide and loose the consciousness of God's favour, and bring down upon himself severe chastisements. There is no case on record of a perfect unbroken spiritual walk. Saintship at best upon earth, is a frail and unsteady thing, ever liable to deviate from the path of holiness. The doctrine of perfect sanctification in the present state is contradicted daily, in the lives of men and women who profess to have attained it. As has been quaintly remarked, “Sinners striving after sinless perfection are easily managed, but those who attain to it, become thenceforward exceedingly crooked and contrary sticks.”

It is also to be remarked, that mere alternation of feeling in christian experience from day to day is not backsliding. Occasional melancholy and depression of spirit is not backsliding. Decrease in the liveliness of our emotions is not backsliding. In mature years the believer be-

comes more calm in his feelings ; and because the novelty and glow of devotional feeling which characterized the period of conversion has to some extent passed away, he is apt to conclude that he is losing ground in the divine life and apostatizing from his God. On the contrary, it is necessary for the full development of christian manhood, that the rush of feeling and extraordinary excitement which often accompanies a change of heart should pass away. "In proportion as *mere feeling* subsides, practical power begins ;—excitement is not strength—true strength comes when it passes into action. The early splendour of the morning is beautiful, but who would wish that it should never melt into the stronger glory of the noonday ? The first emotions of childhood are beautiful, but who would not exchange them in all their freshness for the calm, sober power of manhood ?" And so is it in christian life. First love is of often—nay always—ignorant and inexperienced ; unacquainted with the manifold hindrances that obstruct our progress in holy living, it dreams not of defeat, or reverses ; it fears no opposition ; it anticipates no change in the intensity of its aspirations, or the sweep of its energies. Those sins that so easily beset us are to be destroyed and rooted out of our nature ;—the world—the flesh and the Devil, are to be prostrated before the divine power new born within us ; and marching at the head of God's elect hosts, we are to conquer every adversary and restore the universe to paradisiac bliss !

Now when such fond dreams are not realized, and when christian life is found to consist in conflict—in a deadly struggle against inward and outward foes,—we are apt to get discouraged, and to question the reality of our calling. The frequent outbursts of joy and gladness that character-

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ized our earlier days are wanting. The deep impressions of the divine presence and favour given us at our first communion season, (always memorable to the child of God) seldom recur again, and we give way to unjust suspicions, regarding the permanence of God's love, saying, "Is his mercy clean gone forever—doth his promise fail for evermore?" Such conduct is unworthy of any child of God. The sky even in the clearest days, has occasional clouds. The panorama of the heavens, is continually changing, baffling all powers of description by the artist's pencil. But these changes rather add to the beauty and splendor of the scene. So in like manner, the occasional shadows that pass across the believer's soul, are oftentimes in the hand of God, forerunners of stronger faith and brighter hope. Our progress in divine truth is all the more certain, when that truth is reached, by stern experience in the school of doubt and discipline.

In general the marks of backsliding are these:—

Decrease in the strength of our convictions concerning the reality of unseen things; doubts as to fundamental doctrines of the word of God, that assure the believer of his personal safety in Christ and the completeness of salvation; and an increasing disposition to solve curious questions, and understand perplexing mysteries that have little or no bearing upon a man's existence here or hereafter. I know well, that some of our noblest christian philosophers have had such experiences and tendencies, for the greater our intellectual endowments and mental attainments, the more easily do doubts start up before the mind. Nevertheless they are indications of backsliding, if long continued. Unless there is strong faith to counterbalance them, they are dangerous to our spiritual life.

Decrease in the power of divine truth over our hearts and lives, and a proportionate indifference to the claims of religion. The Bible becomes a burdensome and wearisome study—there is no relish—no hungering after truth—no seeking after God by meditation and prayer. No midnight cries—no intercessory prayers for unconverted men. Religion becomes a purely mechanical and formal thing. We are not indeed slothful in business, but we are not fervent in spirit. Spiritual paralysis lays hold of the springs of the inner life and quenches all noble yearnings after closer fellowship with heaven.

Decrease in our hatred of sin. It is no longer the abominable thing that it seemed in the past—that accursed thing that crucified the Son of God, and brought woe into our world; that caused the angels to fall and now fills the realms of misery. There is less conviction of personal sin and less honest confession; there is greater hardihood in venturing near temptation, and in forming guilty alliances with ungodly men: until

"The struggling spark of good within
Is smothered in the strife of sin."

The whisperings of God's love, that in other days fell so sweetly upon the ear, are now unheard:

"To other strains our souls are set:
A giddy whirl of sin
Fills ear and brain, and will not let
Heaven's harmonies come in."

What, finally, are the causes of spiritual backsliding?

There is, I remark first, a perpetual tendency in human nature to backslide. Backsliding is the result of neglecting to advance. There must be constant progress or their will be constant retrogression. We may also be perfectly unconscious of the fact that our love is growing

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cold, until awakened by some rude shock of providence to a sense of our cold and dying state. "Grey hairs are here and there upon him, yet he knoweth it not." Just as we are unconscious of the radical changes that are going on in our physical constitution, so is it with backsliding in the divine life. Once begun, decline is rapid—the speed is constantly accelerated. The christian's journey heavenward is all the way, like going up an inclined plane. It is against nature—against the strong rebellious impulses of the human heart, and against the customs of the world. Eternal vigilance is demanded in our heavenward journey. We must hold fast that which we have gained, and let no man rob us of our crown.

There is secondly, the ever increasing excitement and competition of the business world, which has a strong tendency to lower the temperature of devotion in the child of God. In the shop and in the market place—was there ever a time when such keen rivalry was witnessed? To keep pace with the demands of commerce and the customs of the age, day must be prolonged into night and the night turned into day. There is little or no leisure for quiet meditation, and soul nourishment. Business men seem to walk from day to day on the verge of a rugged precipice,—their minds tortured and harassed by brooding over expected monetary convulsions, and wide spread panics. Is it wonderful then, that the things of the coming world should be forgotten, amid the pressure of wearying anxieties and crushing cares, which blight the sensibilities and sympathies of the soul, and invade the closet the family altar and the sanctuary of God?

There is thirdly, that love of pleasure and fashion, which is by no means confined to non-professors of reli-

gion, but is making terrible inroads into the church of Christ. When men and women are found more frequently in the halls of laughter and frivolity than in the house of God, or the prayer meeting; when instead of engaging in useful work connected with the Church of Christ, they indulge in follies and foolish conversation—dreaming life away to no purpose and blotting out the line of demarcation between the pious and the profane, how can we expect our churches to be prosperous and the cause of God to flourish? When fashion reigns supreme, and Christ's friends and Christ's enemies—those who profess to love him and those who avowedly despise him, meet so often together in the closest friendship, is it any marvel though numerous cases of backsliding should be found in our churches, and the love of many wax cold?

I come to-day however with more than words of rebuke. The cause of backsliding is departure from God and it must be overcome by a return. "O Israel thou hast destroyed thyself but in me is thy help. Return unto the Lord, for thou has fallen by thine iniquity." It is not an unpardonable sin. God who is rich in mercy, receives his penitent children and remembers their sins no more for ever.

Search out the cause or causes of your backsliding. There is a cause—the cause is not in any unwillingness on the part of Christ to give you the joy of former years. The Saviour never leaves his people, until by their wilful sins they have withdrawn from his fellowship and need the rod of chastisement. Do not blame the coldness and indifference of the Church—or the preaching of the Minister, or the dullness of ordinances. The cause of backsliding is in your own heart. Dissect your soul. Mark

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your conduct during the past few months. Endeavor to ascertain the beginnings of this state of luke warmness, and whatever be the cause destroy it by God's help. There must be no compromise—no yielding up of principle to gratify unhallowed pleasures. Nothing short of crucifixion of the old man with his lusts will suffice.

Continue in prayer, attend the means of grace. Take advantage of every ordinance that God places within your reach. Seek the society of God's people—the fellowship of those that call upon his name. No high degree of spirituality can ever be attained, in the cold atmosphere of the world. “Come out of her my people and be ye separate—touch not the unclean thing,” is the command to every child of God.

The words of my text, although words of rebuke are characterized by great tenderness of feeling. He does not forget your services in the past, poor though they may have been; he has no desire to wound and bruise, or crush you to the earth under a sense of demerit. It is sorrow and not bitterness that moves him to say “thou hast left thy first love.” Do you esteem it a trifling sin? When a wife ceases to love the husband of her youth, or the husband the wife;—when a strange and unnatural coldness and stiffness of manner, characterises their deportment, the one to the other, do we regard it as but a small offence? When the man who promised to love, honor and cleave unto his wife until death divides them, abandons her society, seeks the acquaintanceship of other homes and basks in the sunshine of other countenances, do we regard him with respect and think him worthy of confidence by men of honour and veracity? No—we spurn him as inhuman—as void of all natural affection, as lost to all sense of

christian obligation ! And what shall we say of the man or the woman, who at God's altar solemnly vowed life long fidelity to Jesus Christ, but turns to other idols and worships at other shrines ? What have you gained by the exchange ? Are you perfectly satisfied in the new relations you have found ? Do the gay smiles of worldly companionship, and unrestrained indulgence in the frivolities of the passing hour, make up for that peace and joy and hallowed delight, that characterised the beginnings of discipleship, when the affections were undivided and the love was strong as death ?

"Where is thy first, thy fervent love ?
Dost thou forget my love to thee,
That thine has grown so faint to me ?

Recall to mind the happy days
When thou wast fill'd with joy and praise ;
Repent, thy former works renew,
Then I'll restore thy comforts too."

God's children, by backsliding, lose much real enjoyment. How wearisome and burdensome are the exercises of the closet—the family altar—the prayer meeting—the sanctuary, the sacrament ? without the cheering presence of the Master. As the Bride in the Song who refused admission to her beloved, sorrowfully repented of her folly and sought him when he could not be found, so it is often with those who for a time prefer the pleasures of sense to the pure joys of Christian fellowship. "Open to me, my Master, my dove, my undefiled ; for my head is filled with dews and my locks with the drops of the night," says the Bridegroom. And the Bride replies : "I have put off my coat ; how shall I put it on ? I have washed my feet ; how shall I defile them ?" The Beloved of her soul departs, and conscience begins to accuse. When she opens the

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door, "he had withdrawn himself ; she called, but he gave her no answer ; she sought him, but she could not find him." And so it may be with some who now hear me. God grant penitence for past wrong doing, and grace to lead holier lives.

" Yet, yet awhile, offended Saviour, pause ;
O spare thy rebels for thine own name's sake ;
Withdraw thine hand, nor dash to earth
The covenant of our second birth.

'Tis forfeit like the first—we own it all,
Yet for love's sake
Let it not fall,
But at thy touch let veiled hearts awake ;
Speak for us, or we perish quite."

PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS.

"Kept by the power of God, through faith unto salvation."—1st Peter, 1st and 5th.

Some of the most comprehensive and comforting descriptions of the privileges of saintship, occur as it were incidentally in the word of God. The apostles did not confine themselves to abstract doctrinal discussions, when appropriately and impressively, at the beginning or end of their epistles, they could introduce some valued thought, that seemed to flash upon the mind in the fervor of composition. An illustration of this truth occurs in the text. Peter is writing to the early Christians, persecuted and scattered over the world, for their steadfast adherence to the truth. He describes them as "elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit." He then in a spirit of grateful adoration ascribes praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, "who according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." This hope he declares has for its object "an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away." And not contented with this comprehensive sum-

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mation of spiritual blessings that belong to believers, he adds, "reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God, through faith unto salvation." I propose to consider the latter clause, independent of the context. Viewed by itself, and without detracting from the important truths that precede or follow, it contains the secret of the believer's continuance in holiness, and his final sanctification. All that is necessary is simply to bear in mind, that this is but one, although a most important one, of the many blessings of redemption secured to the child of God, by the death of Christ.

The language is striking. "*Kept by the power of God.*" It indicates *security and safety*. Men store away their valuables under lock and key—in strong iron chests, or in secret vaults built of solid masonry. Often, in addition, where large amounts of gold and silver are at stake, they maintain a standing guard to prevent all chance of robbery by day or night. There is thus implied the idea of *value*. Things that are not considered precious, intrinsically or otherwise, are regarded with feelings of indifference. What is common and possessed of no specific attractions to excite the covetousness of the envious and dishonest, need not be defended. In the case of living beings, still another thought is included in the language of the text—that of *weakness, helplessness, proneness to wander* from the source of strength and the arm of protection. A child may be taken as an illustration of what we mean. In early years it is comparatively feeble. It can walk but a short distance without the support and guidance of a strong arm, and notwithstanding the natural affection it possesses for the parent, it will wander out of sight of home, and into dangerous and forbidden paths, unless the eye of love is

constantly upon its track. It knows not the perils and pitfalls that abound on every hand and trip the unwary traveller. Like the sheep that strays from the fold, and knows not to return, unless found and carried back in the loving arms of the shepherd, so is it with the helpless years of unsuspecting childhood. Finally, there is implied *constant oversight* ; vigilance by day and night ; a readiness to defend against every enemy, and succor in every emergency.

Now all these particulars apply to the child of God, and throw light upon the text. I need not say how ignorant—how weak and defenceless, believers are in themselves ; not merely those who have but entered on a religious life, but even those who for a long term of years have enjoyed the highest privileges of saintship. Men and women considered ripe in saving knowledge—thoroughly conversant with the whole round of Christian duty, and quick to discern the dangers that beset the Christian's daily walk, are often found exhibiting a recklessness of conduct altogether inconceivable. Before very small temptations they instantly fall. To enjoy but a momentary indulgence in sin, and to gratify the baser impulses of their nature, they condescend to deeds of wickedness, inconsistent with that purity of conduct which the gospel demands. Such is human nature—not in its lowest and most debased aspects—not in a state of heathenism and lawlessness, but in what are considered its noblest specimens ;—in cases where, so far as man can judge, God's grace has been at work, and marked advancement has been made in the higher qualities of the Christian life.

The text, then, so far from asserting that regenerated men cannot commit sin, rather implies that they do. The

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language reminds us of our liability to fall, but assures us that kept by the power of God, no true believer can fall away to perdition. The history of eminent saints of God and our own experience attest the truth of scripture. Nowhere does the word of God give countenance to the doctrine of perfection in the present life. Nay, even those who profess to believe in the attainment of such a blessed state, invariably deal with men as if the reverse were the fact. What the text teaches is, that although effectually called by God's spirit to be heirs of salvation—although we are the subjects of renewing grace, and have undergone a radical change—we are every moment in danger of attack by secret and open enemies, who plot our destruction. There is still that within us which seeks gratification in evil without us; a constant proneness to taste of unhal- lowed pleasures and pluck forbidden fruit; to come down from our high position as the sons of God, and mingle with the grovelling and debasing things of earth. Watchfulness, as well as prayer, is constantly demanded. The enemy of souls is crafty; we must be shrewd and vigilant. His policy is secret; we must be skilled in his tactics. His assaults are fierce and desperate; we must steadfastly resist, and tenaciously cling to a stronger arm. There is no period in our earthly history when we can relax our hold of Sovereign power, and stand in our own resources.

How precious, then, is the truth, that God *keeps* his people! They can never be castaways. They may wander far from the fold—they may turn their back, like the prodigal, upon their home, and forget the smiling of their father's countenance, but eventually they shall be restored, and sing with the Psalmist, "He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon

a rock, and established my goings." "He will keep the feet of his saints, but the wicked shall be silent in darkness." "The Lord is thy keeper; the Lord is thy shade upon thy right hand." "He is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy." Surely no child of God, who grasps such promises with any measure of faith, need despair or be cast down! The weakest and most helpless member of the family is the most beloved and cared for. He is the chief concern of the household. There is a rivalry in ministering to his wants and adding to the comforts which help to mitigate the loneliness and sufferings of such a child. So it is in the family of God's children. God looks with an eye of compassion and sympathy upon their imperfections. To sustain—to defend them from evil—to preserve them from the great adversary of souls, is his constant care. Thus sheltered by his outspread wings and shielded by omnipotence;—upheld by that arm that holds the universe in being, and ever followed by a sleepless eye, what is there to fear concerning the ultimate destiny of the child of God?

"Though the sons of might blaspheme,
More there are with us than them;
Hell is nigh, but Christ is nigher,
Circling us with hosts of fire."

Kept by the power of God. We are not able of ourselves to keep from falling. The points of attack and the infirmities of the flesh are too many for human strength and vigilance. Our good resolutions are of no account, unless supported by sovereign grace. When we feel the strongest, we are the most helpless. "In my prosperity I said, I shall never be moved. Lord, by thy favor thou hast made my mountain to stand strong. Thou didst hide thy face, and I was troubled." Peter felt as if he never could deny the Master.

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When the Saviour's face beamed love upon him as he sat at the passover table, he was confident of repelling all the attacks of Satan. Others might forsake Christ—he never. Others might act the coward, when the cross and crucifixion drew near, but he would joyfully go to prison or to death for the love that he bore to the Master. Nay, although warned that the hour of his shameful downfall was at hand, and that Satan desired to sift him as wheat, he repeated in the boldest terms his attachment and unswerving fidelity to the Lord Jesus Christ. But almost as soon as the flush of the passover excitement had passed away, he shamefully denied all knowledge of the Nazarene. Peter was sincere in his professions of attachment, but he overestimated the resources of his nature, when divine guidance has been cast aside. *Nor can ministers and ordinances keep from falling.* We may warn and entreat you to exercise vigilance. We may point out the more likely temptations that beset you, and pray for your steadfast continuance in well doing, but all is in vain without a higher power. The best of ministers are but temptible men; their own safety lies in looking away from the office which they hold to Him who anoints with the heavenly oil, and sanctifies their studies for their own individual good. The means of grace are valuable aids in the Christian life, but when relied upon apart from the enlightening and saving power of God's Holy Spirit, hinder rather than help us. Under the covert of church attendance and church membership, crimes have been secretly committed unsurpassed in the records of human depravity. The priest who has offered incense at the altar, and the people who have sacrificed in the presence of the Most High, have stained their garments with unholy acts. Our hope of continuing steadfastly to the end rests not in the purest forms of saintly fellowship on

earth, but "in committing the keeping of our souls to Him in well doing. as unto a faithful Creator." "Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding. He giveth power to the faint! and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall; But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary, and they shall walk and not faint.' "The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath thee are the everlasting arms."

It is objected to the doctrine we are now discussing, that in practice it has a pernicious tendency. "If you teach a man that his salvation is secured beyond all risk of failure—if a man knows that the Sovereign power of God is pledged for his safety—that the final loss of his soul is impossible—that the covenanted mercies of God are his by eternal and unchangeable decree—where is there the incentive to lead a holy life, to be vigilant and watchful against the many temptations that test the Christian's faith in the present life? If final victory is assured, independent altogether of our own agency and effort, will not a false feeling of security be engendered? In other words, does not the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints tend to licentiousness—an indulgence in sin that grace may abound?" I answer, that although the power of God is pledged to keep the believer from falling away, the work is not all divine. It presumes and demands the co-operation of the creature. Constant prayfulness and diligence are necessary, in order to make our calling and election sure.

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"Kept by the power of God, *through faith* unto salvation." is the language of the text. "Work out your own salvation," says Paul in writing to the Philippians, "with fear and trembling; for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his great pleasure." A vital, active faith in the soul of the believer is thus recognized as an essential in order to the maintenance of the divine life, and the imparting of divine strength. If we have not such a faith we have no right to claim the abiding presence of God's spirit. There is no cause for doubt regarding the faithfulness of Jehovah to his promise, but there is cause for doubt as to our personal relations to that promise.

But it may be said, if the doctrine does not necessarily tend to licentiousness, will it not foster spiritual pride and lead to a boastful spirit of self-congratulation? Not certainly in the case of God's own children. "It is *not of works, lest any man should boast*. We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." It is not by anything in man, even when partially sanctified, but by a power exterior to and superior to the creature, that we are kept. The believer can neither begin nor continue the work of grace. All is due to the purpose of Almighty love and the constant influence of God's spirit on his soul. There is thus the strongest reason for sincere humility and abasement. God, and not man, is exalted; the glory of our preservation, as well as our re-creation, belongs to heaven.

We seldom, indeed, find doubt cast upon this precious truth, by men and women whose conscience testify and whose life manifest the workings of divine grace. The holiest men in the church have believed it and rejoiced in

it. Nor do we ever find any desire to take advantage of the security promised, and lapse into sin. No heart purified by the holy spirit can thus abuse heavenly truth. In most cases, those who have difficulty in accepting the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints, have never experienced a change of heart, and gladly lay hold of every possible objection that may palliate their own criminality and inconsistency, in refusing the gracious offers of the gospel and the guidance of the Spirit.

Which is the more comforting truth? To have the assurance that my future blessedness is safe beyond all question, or to live in uncertainty from day to day as regards my woe or weal throughout eternity? When I know that my salvation is secure, and that I am not left to buffet single handed with the powers of darkness that conspire against me and would drag me down to perdition, I can go forward with courage and confidence, saying, "if God be for me, who can be against me?" This quiets my fears—inspires me with new energy—lifts me above all the distractions and evil suggestions of my lower nature, and gives me perfect repose and peace. I dare not, I cannot doubt the testimony of God's word, for if the final perseverance of the believer is not secured, nothing is secured. My acceptance or rejection of this doctrine is a sequent of my faith or disbelief in the other blessings assured to the child of God by the death of Christ. This is the Apostle's argument in the 8th of Romans. Those in Christ can never be condemned: they are the subjects of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit;—thus led by the Spirit, they are the sons of God;—the covenant of grace is such, that if one thing takes place the others must: "Whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his

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Son ; whom he did predestinate, them also he called ; and whom he called, them also he justified ; and whom he justified, them also he glorified." All this has been secured by God's gift of Christ, whose love for his own is unchangeable. Therefore, says the Apostle, "I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

This union of Christ and his people was a frequent theme of discourse, when the Saviour spoke to his disciples of his approaching death. The prospect of gathering into heaven all his redeemed ones, filled his mind with unspeakable joy. In his valedictory prayer he says, "I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest *keep them from the evil*. Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, *may be with me where I am* ; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me." "Oh, the full joy," says Richard Baxter, "offered to the believer in this one sentence of Christ." *Preservation—sanctification—unity—glory*. It is the language of royalty—of one who knows that what he asks will be granted—of one conversant with the decrees of heaven—whose will is the Father's will ;—of one whose earthly work was nearly done, and who had a right to demand, as he had the power to give, eternal life. It would almost seem as if heaven were not heaven to Christ without his people. His joy, his mediatorial happiness is capable of increase, and dependent upon the fellowship of the redeemed in heaven. This is the joy that was set before him : when he shall see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied ; when, as the Prophet says, "He will save, he will rejoice over thee with

joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing." Then, with a meaning never before realized, he shall say, "those that thou gavest me *I have kept*, and none of them is lost."

Sharers of his glory—partners of his throne and for ever with him, surely this must be the culmination of beatific bliss! Hemmed in by the fleshly conditions of our present existence, we can but faintly conceive of such a state. The light is too bright for mortal eye—the strains too rapid for mortal ears! But patience:—

"These eyes, that dazzled now and weak,
At glancing notes in sunshine wink,
Shall see the King's full glory break,
Nor from the blissful vision shrink:

The distant landscape draws not nigh
For all our gazing: but the soul,
That upward looks, may still descry
Nearer, each day, the brightening goal."

"Thou wilt show me the paths of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore. As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied when I awake with thy likeness." Thus *kept by the power of God unto salvation*, and having attained that holiness which makes meet for the inheritance of the saints in light—the church, the King's daughter, shall enter into the King's palace with gladness and rejoicing—all glorious within and her clothing of wrought gold."

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THE GROWTH OF THE KINGDOM.

"Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, the kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard-seed, which a man took and sowed in his field: Which indeed is the least of all seeds; but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof."

"Another parable spake he unto them: The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened."—Matthew, xiii, v. 31-33.

In former parables spoken by Christ, and contained in this chapter, the difficulties and obstacles in the way of a rapid diffusion of Christianity are chiefly dwelt upon. In that of the sower and the seed, only one part of the seed prospered; three parts were lost. That which was sown by the wayside, on the stony ground and among thorns, produced no results whatever. In the following parable the harvest was greatly injured by the tares which were sown among the wheat by the enemy. A large portion of valuable ground was taken up by the useless weed, which was fit only to be burned. And now, lest the disciples should become unduly discouraged by these repeated declarations, concerning the evil principles that contend in the world and in the human heart, against the truth, Christ adds the words of our text, to indicate the expand-

ing and assimilating power of true religion, in spite of all opposition.

The mustard seed was by no means the smallest of seeds known in the time of Christ, but it was the smallest of the seeds commonly sown by the husbandman, and the tree, when grown, was much larger than the other herbs of the garden. Travellers speak of mustard trees so large that men could climb into the branches. This would be nothing singular in a forest tree, but is unusual in a garden herb. The point especially aimed at in the parable is the largeness of the plant, from a seed so comparatively small. True it had many other valuable properties which may with advantage be used, in describing the effects of Christianity in the world. It was pungent, fiery, penetrating and searching, and so is the gospel, when brought by the Holy Spirit into contact with the hearts and consciences of men. But none of these qualities are at present under review. Enough remains for consideration, if we regard the parable as simply intended to teach the possibility of vast results from insignificant beginnings,—the successive and rapid development and ultimately universal spread of true religion, from a small and unpromising germ.

The Old Testament, as well as the New, invariably represents Christ's kingdom as unpretending and insignificant in its advent. The prophet Ezekiel describes the Assyrian empire as a cedar, whose height was exalted above all the trees of the field. Daniel speaks of the Chaldean empire as a tree whose height reached unto heaven, and the sight thereof to the end of the earth. But far differently do these same Prophets speak of the beginnings of Christianity. It is likened to the stone cut out of the mountain without hands, that break in pieces the images of brass,

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and clay, and silver, and gold ;—to a stream, at first confined to some little hamlet, apparently so resistless that the hand of a child might stop its flow and dissipate its waters, but eventually spreading out and widening, until it becomes a sea, whose arms and tributaries penetrate every corner of the globe. Such illustrations most truthfully set forth the rise of Christ's kingdom in the world, and the present and future victories of the Cross.

First, the kingdom of God is like the mustard seed, because of *the apparent insignificance of the germ*. Take almost any seed, and the product seems marvellous. The oak, from whose timbers are constructed the most durable structures of human art, and the strongest ships that sail the ocean, was once a little acorn, and all the lesser forest trees and garden herbs and flowers sprang from seeds more or less small and insignificant. So it is with the kingdom of God in the world. Not to go further back than the promulgation of Christianity and the organization of the Christian church,—the advent of Christ seemed an event but little likely to meet the wants of the world, and very different from the expectations of philosophers and sages. Amid helplessness and poverty, exposed to danger and death, and surrounded by nothing of earthly state and grandeur did the Saviour of men appear at Bethlehem. The nation from which He sprang was under subjection to Imperial Rome; what little religion then existed in the world was confined to the little space of Palestine, so small, that if blotted from the map, its place would scarce be missed. The Jews, too, his own countrymen, instead of receiving him with open arms, as the predicted Messiah, were among his bitterest enemies, and more, perhaps, than the heathen power, embittered his life and hastened his

death. How insignificant a personage to the eye of men did Jesus appear as he trod in silence and in sorrow the streets of Jerusalem, or wandered to the humble cottage, where Mary and Martha and Lazarus lived ! How pitiable an object, as he stood meek and un murmuring before the judgment seat of Pilate ! How little were the indications of the future greatness of the new religion, as its author bore his cross through Golgotha, towards Calvary, amid the derision of his murderers and the cowardice and indifference of his friends ; still less, when from the cross to the tomb, the lifeless body of the Son of man was carried, amid the grief and tears of his disciples, sincere but few ! " We trusted that it should have been He, which should have redeemed Israel," said the two disciples on their way to Emmaus, " and beside all this, to-day is the third day since these things were done."

The disciples themselves seem at times to have been disappointed in their conception of Christianity. If they did not doubt its divine character, they frequently lost faith in its power, and when at last the Master was taken from them, they gave themselves up to a state of mind that ill became the preachers of a new religion. The declaration of Christ, that feeble though they were, they should be the instruments of evangelizing the world did not fall upon their ears as a reality. Not until the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit began the great work of awakening, did they rouse themselves to a sense of the dignity of their office and the certainty of their success. Need we wonder then, though men of the world should have regarded Christianity as feeble and inadequate to accomplish the great end, prepared by its divine author ?

Second, the kingdom of God is like the mustard seed, be-

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cause of its *unobserved and gradual growth*. The growth of any seed is silent and imperceptible. It is life out of death. After the seed has burst the ground you can scarcely note its progress from day to day, far less see the blade and ear forming and rising upwards. So has it been with the kingdom of God in the world. The soil where the seeds of divine truth were first sown, was most unpromising. That it lived at all,—far less that it extended in spite of the secular despotisms of the age, and the violent opposition of skeptical and unbelieving Jews,—is convincing evidence of its divine character. Nor has there ever been a period when it has not made progress. At times, to the judgement of sense, Christianity seemed well nigh overpowered. The persecution of the Apostolic age was more than equalled by the ten fearful persecutions of the Roman Emperors, during the first three centuries. Then came the dark ages, so fatal to the spread of knowledge, intellectual and spiritual; and finally the tortures of the Inquisition, when the Papacy, under the name of religion, endeavored to destroy all traces of a pure christianity, and exterminate the few remaining members of Christ's kingdom upon the earth. But in spite of the conflicts and martyrdoms of these dark ages and evil days, the truth advanced. The seed was constantly growing, watered though it was with the precious blood of God's own saints. The rage and fury of the enemy but increased the boldness and heroism of Christ's followers, until now, like the mustard seed, Christianity spreads forth its giant arms across continents and kingdoms, offering shelter and security to all who are within reach of its influence and power.

No man can explain how the seed grows. Our know-

ledge ends with the fact. It is due to that Divine Being whose hand is constantly moving in the world of nature. And no more can we explain the wonderful growth of the kingdom. Silently, through the Spirit's agency, not by sudden and marvellous explosions, but by noiseless operations. Just as the temple of Solomon rose up silently but majestically in its fair proportions, does the kingdom of righteousness rise upon the ruins of humanity, until the work of grace is completed, and that of glory begun.

In the growth of this kingdom every believer has a part. The husbandman may not be able to aid the seed as long as it lies beneath the ground, but when the plant begins to grow, his daily care and cultivation is demanded. Just in proportion to his diligence is his reward. It is his to foster and remove all hindrances. The laws of nature demand such care, else they refuse to yield abundantly. And so it is in the kingdom of God. Man is a co-worker with heaven. Certain laws in the spiritual world must be observed before we can look for certain results. Although the growth of the seed does not depend upon our efforts, that growth may be hastened or impeded according to our interest or apathy. The promise of the text, so far from leaving all to the operation of supernatural powers, demands every Christian to do what in him lies, for the hastening of the glorious end.

Third, the kingdom of God is like the mustard seed as regards *the greatness of the results*. The mustard seed becomes one of the greatest of trees, in which the birds of the air build their nests. Christ came from heaven to earth to benefit no single race, but to bless mankind. The Gospel He proclaimed was for all nations. We see not, as yet, the complete fulfilment of the promise, but we see the in-

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indications more visible than in any other age, that the universal reign of Christianity is drawing near. If heathen lands are not yet reclaimed and civilized, there are openings for the gospel such as have never heretofore been witnessed. Steadily and radically, one form of wickedness after another is being abolished, while morality and virtue assert their sovereignty. Despotic governments are being softened. Unchristian lands, in spite of intolerant creeds, are unconsciously feeling the influence of divine truth. The fetters are falling from the slave and the yoke of bondage from the human mind. The sun of righteousness already gilds the mountain tops of far-off lands, and soon in his meridian glory shall flood the world. The wilderness shall become a garden, the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose; thorns and briers shall give place to myrtles and palm trees, and the islands of the sea, with loud acclaim, shall sing the honors of our Saviour King.

And as is the process of Christ's kingdom in the world, so is it in individual souls. Grace is at first but a germ, like the mustard seed. Its progress is unseen, silent, gradual and apparently slow, but its results are vast and glorious. Man's spiritual powers, like his intellectual, are at first infantile. Only one man has ever been created perfect and furnished with all the powers of a matured and cultivated intellect, and only one man has ever been created with a pure and holy heart. But grace once implanted in the human heart, grows under the most adverse circumstances, and is developed by the most insignificant of agencies. A word, a prayer, a sermon, often fixes the newly converted soul in its attachment to the Saviour, and strengthens its resolutions. The first cry for mercy, the first serious thought, may seem small and trifling, but under God's blessing how great are the consequences! Grace

once in the heart can never be destroyed. There may be alternations of feeling, occasional doubts and weakness of faith in regard to important matters of doctrine, but he that begins the work will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.

Have not the agencies employed in modern times, as well as in Old Testament times, for the accomplishment of God's designs of mercy with our world, been comparatively weak and insignificant? God's people are in cruel bondage under the haughty King of Egypt. A mother takes her child, and, to save him from the hands of the bloody tyrant, lays him in a little basket by the banks of the River Nile. Directed by Providence, the Hebrew child falls into the very hands which, in ordinary circumstances, would have ensured its death. But, destined for great and noble work, he is spared to become the deliverer and commander of the Israelites and law-giver of the world. Our world lay panting for civil and religious liberty in the days of papal supremacy, with no one to marshal the host of God's elect, and defy the powers of anti-Christ. A young monk, sitting in his lonely cell in a German convent, becomes convinced of the superstitious dogmas of his church, and, renouncing his faith, becomes the herald of the Reformation and inaugurates a religious awakening that shook the thrones of Popes, and spread the truths of the Kingdom throughout the world. A few years ago, in the midst of the financial crisis, that brought panic and consternation into this and other lands and involved so many seemingly prosperous men in ruin, a single individual in the city of New York resolved to establish a noon-day prayer meeting for the benefit of business men. For some days but few attended, but the few kept on praying. At length the

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numbers swelled, until within a few months the spacious room, containing hundreds, was crowded to excess. The flame of revival spread. Churches and theatres alike were opened at noon-day for religious exercises, and thousands savingly converted to the living God. And now the Fulton street prayer meeting has become one of the wonders of the age, where, as in Pentecostal times, amazing works of grace are wrought.

In the parable of the leaven, the same truth is taught us in different form. In that of the mustard seed, the progress of the Kingdom is from within. In that of the leaven, by acquisitions from without. The gospel, in virtue of its contagious influence, spreads among the masses of humanity, transforming and changing the evil principles of the human heart and assimilating all that it touches to its own nature, even as the leaven does the meal.

Although the process of fermentation is in a general way understood, how the leaven produces certain changes in the substance with which it is mixed, is as yet one of the mysteries of science. Two facts are plain. That it needs but a very small quantity of leaven to produce a complete change in a large quantity of flour, and that it is only necessary that the process of fermentation should begin wherever the leaven happens to be, in order to its permeating the entire mass. So, says Christ, is the kingdom of Heaven. "It is like unto leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened." From this we learn:

First, That Christianity is *an imported power*. The leaven was taken and put into the three measures of meal. There was no affinity whatever between the substances.

So the gospel of the grace of God is an element foreign to our fallen world. It does not grow up spontaneously in men's hearts, nor find a cordial reception in society. It is something brought into this world, antagonistic to all the commonly received opinions and principles of men. It is not a philosophy, the product of human genius, but a quickening power cast into the dead mass of humanity, to exercise its renovating and regenerating effects. It thus maintains a constant protest against the false beliefs and erroneous practices which enslave the mass of men, while, at the same time, it gains ascendancy over the human heart.

Second, Christianity is *a hidden power*. The leaven was hidden in the meal. Working from within outwards, it changed the entire substance from centre to circumference. And thus it ever is with saving truth. It works internally before it is developed in the outward life. Regeneration does not consist in mere reform of conduct, but in a radical change of heart. It does produce an outward reformation, but the outward never precedes internal convictions. "The kingdom of God is within you," said Christ. It does not consist in mere observance of outward forms, and in avoiding the grosser sins of life. It is a radical change of nature,—the implanting of new principles and the cherishing of new desires. To put mere restraint from vice in room of vital piety is like tying decayed apples upon the branches of a barren tree. The fruit turns to rottenness, but the tree is not benefited by the unnatural alliance. There is no real union in such a case between the branches and the fruit, and no channel for the transmission of the sap.

Third, Christianity is *an assimilating power*. The leaven gradually penetrated the whole mass, until every particle

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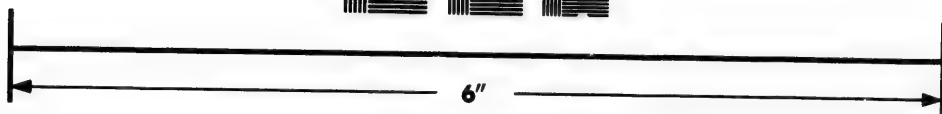
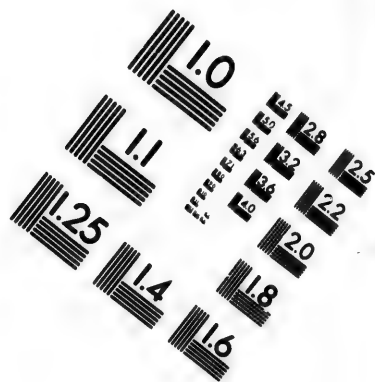
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partook of its own nature. Nothing but the leaven, or some such fermenting power, could accomplish this change. As has been remarked, if the woman had taken a stone, or piece of granite, or common pebble, or even a precious jewel, or any precious metal such as gold and silver, and placed it in the heart of the meal, no change would have taken place. But immediately the leaven is incorporated with the meal, the work of fermentation goes on, until all is leavened. It is thus when the gospel is received into the heart. It never rests until it has changed the whole man, and recreated in him the image of God. If any man be in Christ, or if Christ be formed in any man the hope of glory, he becomes a new creature. There are new views of sin and of the Saviour; new resolutions; new and higher aims in life; a new heart, a new creed, and a new existence.

This change is not only radical, but it is permanent. It is more than a mere momentary impulse towards holiness, or a violent mental agitation which speedily passes away, leaving no evidences of results behind. The work goes on, until the soul is fitted for the enjoyments of heaven. As the Apostle says, we are thus "changed from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." Just as old coins are thrown into the furnace and recast, bearing an entirely new device and the image of another sovereign, so the grace of God, impresses the divine image upon the heart and assimilates the entire nature into conformity to the will of heaven.

True civilization, which is but another name for Christianity, ever thus achieves its victories. It does not attack the mere framework of society, by correcting flagrant abuses, but it endeavours to lay the foundations of virtue and holi-



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ness in the citizenship of the Kingdom. When individual hearts are changed, the aggregate character of the nation is soon changed. All missionary success has thus been promoted. Not by formally attacking vices that are inseparable from false religions, but by preaching and teaching the simple doctrines of the Cross. Thus did Christianity become so terribly effective against heathen governments and pagan systems of morality. The Roman Empire felt an influence through its every artery, which it could neither understand nor cast off. The wickedness of the age was not so much dwelt upon, as the positive truths of Christianity were enforced. The spirit of the gospel is directly opposed to every form of despotism and immorality, and wherever it is faithfully declared, there will be found reformation and purification in the body politic.

It is implied in the parable under consideration, that the religion of Christ, shall yet embrace the world. The end is not yet, but every additional soul, brought under the influence of the truth, hastens that promised period. We are never to despond, although the conversion of the world to the Saviour seems distant. From man to man and family to family and sea to sea, the glad tidings of great joy are being transmitted, until—as every particle of the meal is changed—so this entire globe, shall become the garden of the Lord. One sinner brought under deep concern for his soul's salvation, yearns to tell others his deliverance from wrath and the newly imparted joy that possesses his soul. The contagion spreads, until the prayer meeting is all aglow with holy fire. The congregation next feels the influence of revival, and the entire community shares in the common blessing. The town or city in its turn becomes a radiating point to other parts of the kingdom, and the breath of prayer

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finally reaches other lands, separated by intervening oceans. It is thus that our world is silently being prepared for the dwelling-place of its King. Appearances may be against the progress of our race, but the purposes of redeeming love are steadily hastening on towards fulfilment. "The whole earth, shall yet be filled with the knowledge of the glory of God."

" Zion's King shall reign victorious,
All the earth shall own his sway ;
He will make his Kingdom glorious,
He shall reign through endless day.

Nations now from God estranged
Then shall see a glorious light ;
Night to day shall then be changed,
Heaven shall triumph in the sight."

Among the many lessons taught us by this subject, are these:

Let us ever be hopeful of the most insignificant christian enterprises, The apostolic church assembling in the upper room at Jerusalem was small ;—the Sabbath school enterprise was insignificant in its first conception ; the missionary cause a century ago, was but a name, compared with its present vast appliances and wide spread ramifications. But the power of God was in each and all, and hence their victory and permanence.

Let us never be discouraged by the apparently slow growth of Christ's Kingdom in the world. We are impatient of results, forgetting the promise, " I the Lord will hasten it in his time." We cannot understand the cause of delay in many instances, but we know that just as long winters, that precede warm springs and golden summers, are essential for the growth and maturing of the precious grain, so these long delays are necessary for the completion

of God's designs, with the nations of the earth. In the exercise of faith and patience, all our expectations shall be more than realized.

Finally, let us ask ourselves the question, are we acting as leaven in the world? "Ye are the salt of the earth—Ye are the light of the world." Every living soul possesses some influence for good or evil. We are centres, radiating from day to day, life or death to those around us. "No man liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself." Grace in the heart, cannot remain inactive. It must have a field in which to operate. It will rest satisfied with nothing short of making conquests for the Saviour. Let us not wait for grand occasions to speak and act, but seize the most insignificant events of life, for doing good to our fellow men. By the conscientious discharge of our christian obligations, we are helping forward the world, towards ultimate and final deliverance from sin and sorrow !

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DUTY MEASURED BY ABILITY.

"She hath done what she could."—Mark xiv, v. 8.

"*She hath done what she could.*" Such was the eulogy pronounced by Christ on the woman of Bethany, who brake the box of precious ointment and poured it upon his head. Briefly but tersely it sets before us the true measure of Christian obligation. Not what other professing Christians do—nor what may satisfy the miserably low standard of duty and generosity which now proves current in the Church of Christ, but that each man in his own sphere of action, according to the mental and moral endowments conferred upon him by his Maker, and the opportunities afforded him for their exercise, shall do what he can for the good of the world and the glory of God. If in all our churches, this was the standard of Christian endeavour, Zion would no longer mourn, nor the walls of Jerusalem lie desolate.

When the Saviour uttered the words he had a two-fold object in view. On the one hand he desired to rebuke a parsimonious spirit that had crept in among the disciples, in virtue of which they regarded everything as so much

wasted capital that did not *directly* produce substantial results, and on the other to hold up before them the example of this Christian woman, whose overflowing heart and burning love towards the Saviour, led her to give, not only the most valuable gift in her possession but *her all* to Christ. The event took place in Bethany, a place memorable and endeared to Christ for many reasons. Here as he sat at meat in the house of Simon the leper, there came a woman—Mary the sister of Martha and Lazarus—having an alabaster box of ointment of Spikenard, "*very precious,*" which she brake, or literally crushed together, pouring its contents upon the Saviour's head. Such a sudden and unlooked-for act, the act of a woman in straitened circumstances, and more likely to be an object of charity than the giver of such a costly present seemed surpassing strange in the eyes of the disciples. *Some* had indignation within themselves, while another gospel indicates that *all* the disciples shared more or less in the same opinion. Most probably the feeling of indignation rose first in the heart of Judas, but ultimately spread over the entire brotherhood, until a general feeling of dissatisfaction prevailed. "Why was this waste of ointment made?" What good end or purpose can such destruction of precious ointment secure? It might have been sold for three hundred pence, and the proceeds given to the poor! And so they murmured against her!

The objections urged against such apparent extravagance seem at first sight well founded. But in another gospel the secret of the disciples' indignation is explained, and is referred to the covetousness and avarice of Judas Iscariot who kept control of the treasury. "This, he said, *not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief and had the bag, and bare what was put therein.*"

From this simple narrative we may learn certain truths as to the measure of Christian liberality. How much should I give for charitable objects? for the support of missions? for the advancement of the church or denomination? What proportion of my time and means am I bound to give to the service of Christ? In Jewish times, a tithe was demanded of every member of the Theocracy, but under the Christian dispensation the standard is higher—we are to do what we can. To be more explicit, *our charity is not to be measured by the benevolence of others.* Giving as others give, or *in proportion* as others give, is one of the most fatal errors of our day, but almost universal in certain churches. Just as some men measure their piety and devotion to religion, by the piety of their neighbors, so do men measure their gifts to the church by the liberality of their fellow members. When the collector presents the subscription book, there is a careful scrutiny of the names and amounts already obtained, followed by such expressions as, “I cannot give more than Mr. so and so,” or, “If he gives I will give.” This miserable practice has become so common in the Christian world, that to secure contributions for the most praiseworthy enterprises, discreditable expedients are in many cases resorted to. Christians set up false standards of duty and obligation and regulate their life by such standards to the exclusion of principle and God’s higher law. In many cases they take as their model men who are notorious for worldliness and grasping covetousness—men who give but seldom for any object and then begrudgingly. Not only so, but they take the minimum of such men’s offerings as the maximum of their own!

Such conduct is unworthy of Christian professors. There are men in every community possessed of thousands

upon thousands, from whom we should never ask or expect a charitable contribution, for the simple reason that they make no profession whatever of Christian principle. They live only for this world—they deny all the claims of the Church of Christ. They are not their brothers' keeper, either in temporal or spiritual affairs. No church member should be satisfied in making such men the model of a religious life, as no church member would dare to go before the bar of God and say, "I made these men *my standard in Christian practice.*" According to our individual endowments and possessions, we are at last to be judged, not by the generosity or parsimony of others.

Our benevolence is not to be measured by the amount of our donations. An example of this truth is to be found recorded in the twelfth chapter of Mark's gospel, where a poor widow cast in two mites into the treasury. It seems to have been a sort of extraordinary voluntary collection, made at the feast of the Passover. Having finished his public instructions, Christ took his seat over against the treasury. Many that were rich cast in much. After a while there came a poor woman (whose humility and the smallness of her contribution prevented her coming sooner) and cast in two mites, which make a farthing. It was done unostentatiously and with no thought that the act would be recognized. But as Christ saw the gift, small in itself, doubtless, contrasted with the larger offerings of the rich, and knew the motive that prompted to the act, he said to the disciples, "Verily I say unto you, that this poor widow hath cast in more than all they which have cast into the treasury; for all they did cast in of their abundance, but she of her want did cast in all she had, even all her living." It is very easy to understand why

the Saviour so highly commended her. She was a widow—a poor widow. No mention is made of her earthly support. She depended for a living on the labor of her hands, and seemed rather to need support and charity than give to others. Yet this poor widow cast in all she had. That which was originally intended for pressing wants she gave to the treasury of the temple. Not because of the amount, however, but because in proportion to her means she *gave more than the rich*, who cast in their silver and gold, is her name mentioned and her example noted. They gave of their abundance, she of her poverty; they gave what they never missed, she gave all her living.

A man may give what seems liberally for the cause of Christ, and yet give far less in proportion than the widow and her mites. A man of large capital subscribes five hundred dollars for church extension or missionary effort. His poor neighbour or workman, possessing no capital whatever, but living from day to day by the sweat of his brow, gives five dollars. Which gives most? According to the judgment of the world it is the former. Five hundred dollars!! The church is amazed and gratified beyond measure at such wondrous munificence! The religious papers hasten to spread the news of such unbounded liberality, and the man is canonised as a perfect saint! And yet, according to the judgment of heaven, the poor man gives vastly more in proportion than his richer master. The one gave out of his abundance, the other out of his penury. To the one the gift was a matter of no consequence. It did not call for the practice of self-denial in the smallest degree; but in the other case there was a sacrifice of some of the comforts of existence.

The conclusion we arrive at is, that the *only standard recognized by the word of God* for giving and working in the Church of Christ is *ability*. We are to give according to our means, and labor according to our opportunities. It is not the amount of our labor that is reckoned, but the fidelity and sincerity of our work, and the cheerfulness which prompts our gifts. The simple record, "She hath done what she could," is better far than the adulations of our fellow men or the honors of the world.

This principle, if rightly understood and practiced, would revolutionize the church and be a means of infinite blessing to the world. If church members did but realize that they are accountable to the extent of their ability, how very different would the resources of every department of Christian enterprise become! Men frequently, and it may be unconsciously, deceive themselves as to their ability. No excuse is oftener found upon the lips of Christians than, "I am unfitted for the duty. I cannot discharge its obligations." What does Christ demand? Nothing but what you can give and that cheerfully. He does not expect you to exercise intellectual powers which have never been given or cultivated, but he demands that what you do possess be expended for his glory. Do what you can—"It is accepted according to what a man hath, and not according to what a man hath not." And so in regard to money offerings. If you can say in every instance, with a clear conscience, "I give according to my ability and as God hath prospered me," nothing beyond is required. The contribution may be small—not more in a lifetime than the alabaster box of ointment—but it will be accepted for the spirit which prompts the giver.

The most cheerful givers in all our churches are our poorer brethren. The give what they can and in the right spirit ; those who give least deny themselves the most. So it was said of the churches of Macedonia. Having first given themselves to the Lord, they gave up to and beyond their power. "In a great trial of affliction, the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded with the riches of their liberality." Surely, Christians of the present day, enjoying such priceless privileges under the gospel dispensation, are bound to exemplify the spirit of the Apostolic age, and give generously for the extension of Christ's Kingdom, to which they owe so much. "Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.

In our own day, the claims of the poor are often made an argument for withholding all acts of benevolence from every other object, presented to the sympathies of the Church of Christ. These claims of the poor upon the generosity of Christians are urged, *not by men really interested* in their welfare, but by a class who seek credit for benevolence and charity, when in reality they are mammon seekers of the worst description. Why give for Foreign Missions, says one, or for Home Missions, says another ? Why build churches, when, like our forefathers, we might worship under the canopy of heaven, or in ruder and more homely structures than the taste of the age demands, and take the money thus expended for the support of the poor in our several localities ? Why have so many Bible and Tract Societies spread over the land, depending for support upon the Christian Church, when so many are destitute of the necessities of life ? Such language springs

from pure selfishness, and to all such Christ replies as he did to the disciples who complained of the waste of ointment. "Let her alone—why trouble ye her? She hath wrought a good work on me. Ye have the poor always with you, and *whensoever Ye will, Ye may do them good; but me Ye have not always.*" "*She hath done what she could.*"

"A good work." Not simply an act blameless and unimpeachable, but good in itself, because of the motive that prompted it. *It had a worthy object.* This valuable gift, which seemed in the eyes of Judas and the other disciples sinful extravagance, and might have been so in other circumstances, was the offering of purest gratitude. *It was well timed*, for this was the Saviour's last visit to Bethany, and if this poor woman would show her love, she must do so now, or lose the opportunity for ever. "Ye have the poor always with you, but me ye have not always," said Christ. In other words, charity and alms giving are commendable, but there are occasions every day for such acts of Christian benevolence, but the present is the only opportunity this woman has of testifying what she feels towards her Lord and Master. *She hath done what she could*, or what she had she did—according to her means she freely gave. The outward act was but a feeble exponent of her inward feelings; but it gave evidence that whatever she held dear upon earth, she was willing to sacrifice for Christ. She had been forgiven much and therefore she loved much. She had a grateful recollection for his past kindness. She felt herself indebted to Sovereign grace, more than tongue can describe, or the longest life of devoted consecration repay. Thus it was, that she not only poured out upon his head the precious ointment, but she

broke the box in order to show that she was more than willing to sustain a loss. Her life—her all, was henceforth to be a willing sacrifice in Christ's service. In the words of the well-known hymn, we seem to hear her say—

Oh to grace how great a debtor,
Daily I'm constrained to be?
Let that grace, Lord, like a fetter,
Bind my wandering heart to Thee!
Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it,
Prone to leave the God I love—
Here's my heart—Oh take and seal it!
Seal it for thy courts above.

There is nothing wasted in the whole round of Christian sacrifice or labor. Even when our charity and benevolence have unconsciously been exercised towards unworthy objects, there is more than compensation, in the growth of sympathy and tenderness within the soul, and when our Christian liberality has been expended upon worthy objects and enterprises, there is more than recompence in watching the results of our humble efforts. Every Christian act is immortal. It may not instantly appear so, but it blooms and blossoms in future years, to the honor of the Master and the glory of His name. It was so in the present instance. This poor woman sacrificed her alabaster box and precious ointment, but she received Christ more richly in her soul. As she poured out her fragrant ointment upon Him who was so soon to shed His most precious blood for her, she increased her interest in heaven, and her claim to immortal treasures. Nor did the action perish with the occasion. Verily I say unto you, says Christ, wheresoever this gospel is preached throughout the whole world, this that she hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her." Her example is thus held up for imitation in all time coming. Her name is embalmed in the volume of

inspiration, whilst illustrious heroes, according to the judgment of the world are long forgotten. Thus hath God chosen the foolish things of this world to confound the wise, and the weak to confound the mighty.

The Lord Jesus Christ still sits over against the treasury of the Church. As its King and Head, he claims a proportion of every man's substance. He is cognisant of the motives, and knows every separate contribution that is given for the extension of his Kingdom upon earth. Character can be as truly weighed in the balance of the sanctuary by the liberality of our offerings as by the most rigid attendance upon ordinances. In the present existence we may withhold what is due from us, and still enjoy a reputation for benevolence, but the day of judgment will disclose such dishonesty, along with every other defalcation of the life. Such a realising sense of omniscience, who scans our every act should produce conscientious giving and unconstrained service. "Will a man rob God?" says the Prophet Malachi. Yea ye have robbed me. Ye are cursed with a curse, for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation. Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of Hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room to receive it."

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FIDELITY IN LITTLE THINGS.

**"He that is faithful in that which is least, is faithful also in much; and he that is unjust in the least, is unjust also in much.—
Luke xvi, v. 10.**

The constancy of nature depends upon its harmonious working, in the smallest as well as the grandest details. Let there be but for a moment, suspension of the law of gravitation, and the myriads of suns and systems that revolve in space, together with the globe on which we stand, would rush into chaos. It is as necessary "that a grain of sand should be as obedient as a world." The same law holds good in morals and religious obligations. That same God who impressed upon nature what we call law, has given to his rational creatures a code of duties, in which men are bound to discharge the smallest obligations as much as the greatest service. Christianity teaches that true obedience is demanded in every particular, and that no man dare wilfully shrink from the performance of duty, be it ever so trifling or insignificant, or wilfully commit any sin, however small it may appear. Character and conduct in God's sight are composed of minute details, not of splendid and striking displays of justice, honesty and benevolence, which may occasionally startle the world and atone for gross and aggravated acts of wrong-doing. No matter

what our position in life, if we faithfully discharge our obligations to God and man, the favor of heaven is ours in the present, and the rewards of the righteous shall be ours in the future. Fidelity, truthfulness, adherence to principle are the tests of christian character. These should pervade our entire being, not only when fidelity is certain to secure for us certain benefits and blessings, but when it is certain to expose us to worldly loss. We must apply this higher law to the least things in life, and be actuated in every condition and circumstance of life by a sense of the perfection of God's law. We do not assert that "little things" are as important, as comprehensive and lasting in their influence as great things, or that we are to regard all duties and obligations as of equal magnitude. But what we assert is that if a man systematically neglects the lesser obligations of conscience, he will at the same time be found guilty of violating the greater and more solemn demands of morality and religion. When a man begins to think and say, "This is but a trifling sin—I may with perfect impunity indulge in it"; or, "this is but a small infraction of the law of honesty—I may without fear of discovery or punishment venture on it;"—there is a loosening of the entire moral structure—the beginning of that downward career, which, but for divine grace, ends in the eternal ruin of both body and soul. A few considerations will show the truth of this remark.

Infidelity in little things deteriorates and debauches the conscience. I am not speaking of the outward results of a course of dishonesty and wrong-doing; I am supposing that a man may secretly violate the principles of justice, truth and rectitude without ever being called to answer for his crimes at a human tribunal. The internal loss that a man

suffers is, however, infinitely greater than public disgrace. Men for the most part do not think so. They judge of the morality of the right and the wrong of actions by their results. Success even in what is wrong is regarded as making such conduct right; an idea utterly subversive of all morality. There are many lines of conduct that appear indifferent—neither good nor bad—that are all the while sapping the foundations of conscience. Every action that a man performs has not only a bearing upon society, but has a recoil upon his own moral constitution. In every duty discharged and in every word spoken we are to consider not only what shall be its effects upon our fellow men and society at large, but what shall be its effects upon our own moral nature—upon our feelings—our judgment and our whole subsequent career. For, supposing that the omission of the lesser duties of life and indulgence in lesser sins common to a large number of men, should have no influence whatever upon the world at large, the power and evil influence which they must exercise upon the actor and agent should be enough to deter us from pursuing such a course of conduct. A long series of petty meannesses—the continued omission of any one duty—systematic treachery and fraud, although not coming within the reach of law; little falsehoods that men are shocked to have called by the name of “lies;” these and a thousand minor delinquencies which may never appear to act beyond the limits of the individual, debauch the inner life, degrade manhood and eventually obliterate all distinctions between good and evil. Conscience, which may be able to resist great temptations and remonstrate against open acts of immorality, falls prostrate before such minute and insidious infidelities. Taken separately, they seem trifling, unimportant, but in their collective capacity they are omnipotent for evil. The effect

in any one case may be small, but the sum total is great. A single drop of water is but a tiny agent in the material world, but the constant falling of such drops will wear away the hardest rock; the moth is but a little insect yet it eats the finest texture; the coral insect is among the smallest of ocean's inhabitants, but myriads of corals at work for centuries, construct coral islands of vast proportions and terrible significance to the mariner. So, in like manner the man who is habitually unjust and unfaithful in the lesser duties and obligations of life, becomes at last indifferent to the higher demands of God's law. The moral sense is perverted, deadened, and rendered totally unreliable and untrustworthy as a guide in the commonest transactions of life.

Fidelity in little things furnishes a surer test of character than in greater. It is comparatively easy for a man to be faithful, when placed in a prominent position, receiving the commendation of his fellows and supported by other tangible considerations. Even this, apart from thorough purity of motive, will not prevent unfaithfulness, but it often assists a man, not otherwise proof against temptation. But when our actions are unknown to the world, and when we work on from day to day and year to year, honestly endeavoring according to the measure of our ability to discharge our varied obligations, and resolutely refusing all inducements to increase our personal gains, by means considered quite fair and honorable among worldly men, such conduct is the very essence of true heroism.

We live in an age when it is of prime importance that this truth should be impressed upon society. No man is considered great or valuable nowadays, unless he has occupied some commanding position, and created an excite-

ment in the community or nation. Notoriety, ostentation and display, are estimated as cardinal virtues. The young are taught that unless they do something striking and singular, they are useless; mere ciphers and nonentities in society. The common duties of life are despised. The smaller obligations are left unfulfilled. However honest and upright a man may be in his calling, he is but lightly esteemed unless he can do something to astonish the world. All this has a tendency to make men despise humble vocations, and create a spirit of dissatisfaction with the ordinary business of life. No man is fitted for public positions where great and weighty questions are to be solved, who has not in the more limited arena of his own private affairs, exhibited strict adherence to the laws of probity. There is no honest calling in life ignoble. It is the way in which a man carries himself and acquits himself that makes his business honorable or dishonorable. Every position in life is responsible and grand, because it tests our fidelity to principle, our loyalty to conscience and our independence of accidental circumstances. To be forever looking away from the ordinary transactions of life—from common vocations and duties—to be continually imagining that we are born with power and faculties, adapted to fill the highest situations and wear the greatest honors, is evidence of unfitness for the humblest stations. The man who cannot overcome the difficulties and temptations of the present hour—who cannot succeed in the store or at the desk, was never intended by his maker to rule over kingdoms. Dogged perseverance, assiduity and faithful discharge of the small and common-place demands of life, is the true path to dignity and honor. The really noble-minded men of the world are those who from obscurity, have by strict fidelity, risen to eminence; not by strokes of fortune—not by sud-

den revolutions in society—not by unregulated and fitful efforts, but by steady and persevering toil. Our merchant princes for the most part were message boys and apprentices to the most laborious trades. Our chancellors and statesmen and jurists, gave proof of their ability and integrity in the lower and less distinguished departments of professional life, before being promoted to the judicial bench. The true heroes of the world—men who for principle have endured calumny and reproach—have overcome the assaults of Satan a thousand times before in the more secret domain of their passions and pride.

Infidelity in little things, is not only as criminal as in great things, but it prepares the way for the most flagrant and open wickedness. The man who steals a penny is as much a thief as the man who steals thousands of dollars; the smallness of the amount makes no difference whatever. To abstract large sums of money and defraud the Government or revenues of the country, may in the eyes of the community be deemed a much more aggravated offence, but the effect upon conscience and the judgment formed of the guilt of these respective acts of wickedness is the same. A man may not better himself much, it is true, by a petty theft, but his moral sense suffers as much deterioration as if it had been a great one. This is scarcely ever taken into account by men in daily life. We speak of members of Parliament and municipal corporations, swindling the country and commonwealth of millions, and we raise the cry of corruption and extravagance, and in our holy indignation at such monstrous dishonesties, we put forth strenuous efforts to bring about a change; and yet in private business transactions, men are daily as guilty and reprehensible. Give such men the chance of pilfering in

high places and helping themselves to the spoils of office, and they would be found formidable rivals to the men whose actions they condemn. If not faithful in the smaller obligations of life, how can a man be trustworthy in the halls of legislation, and in the performance of the more responsible offices connected with representative Government ?

Men seem to think it is a very heinous offence to perjure themselves, but scarcely a sin at all to equivocate and lie ; a very wicked thing to commit a forgery, but a small offence to cheat a customer by misrepresentation and deceit ! You would not for the world engage in the unlawful trade of counterfeiting, but if a counterfeit bill should come into your possession in the ordinary course of trade, it is cast back into the drawer, in the hope that it may be passed along to some unsuspecting neighbor ! You *know that it is worthless*, but you try to pacify conscience by saying "somebody has passed it upon me, and I cannot be a loser." The man who acts thus is a counterfeiter in the sight of God ; the passing of that single bill, is as great an offence in the sight of the Almighty, as if he had deluged the whole country with spurious coin. Far better in such circumstances, for a man to lose his money than lose conscience and integrity.

It has already been remarked that every petty wickedness affects the conscience—destroys the perception of right and wrong and endangers our highest well-being. Once a course of wrong-doing is begun, there is no limit to a man's avarice and passion. The question of degrees in crime is never considered once the heart has been defiled by impurity. It is not the great sins of which a man

should be afraid, but the little sins that appear so trifling and unimportant. It is not the omission of great duties that is dangerous, but the neglect of little obligations; a wilful and steady ignoring of the minute claims and responsibilities that confront us every hour. If these are disregarded, a reckless habit is cultivated—a moral indifference to the sanctions and requirements of law, which paves the way for every form of iniquity. The most terrible inhumanities that shock society, have sprung from small and trifling misdemeanors. Criminals and malefactors who die on the scaffold, drunkards and debauchees who fall into untimely graves; highway robbers and swindlers who crowd our penitentiaries, are all notable examples of the fact that a path of wickedness once entered upon, hurries its victim to the very brink of perdition.

But perhaps you can point to men guilty of minor sins, but never chargeable with greater crimes. The comparative honesty of such men does not proceed from principle, but from want of power, or certain other considerations that constrain them to keep within the bounds of law. The man who does not adhere to principle in small transactions, will, when opportunity offers, launch out into the boldest vices. What is your opinion of the man who deceives in small matters? If there is certain evidence of intention to defraud, you instantly withdraw confidence. You say, "that man only lacks the occasion to rob to the greatest amount." Fear of punishment, selfish considerations, or the opinion of society, may for a time prevent the legitimate workings of a dishonest nature, but not for any lengthened period. For such a man you have the utmost detestation; you despise him "more than the princely scoundrel who riots in defalcation at the rate of a hundred

thousand dollars a stroke." The latter you denounce as a villain, but at the same time you recognize the splendor of his audacity and the magnificence of his plans and achievements. *He is unquestionably bad*; but the other is not only bad, but *mean*. "He goes as far as he dares to go, and is as bad as the man who dares to go further and did go."

Some men take credit for keeping clear of vices and crooked policies that stain the character of their companions, when in fact, it is lack of opportunity, or the absence of great temptation that keeps them where they are. "I have never," says such a man, "committed theft, or broken any of the more prominent commandments of the decalogue." What does that prove? Nothing whatever in itself as to your character. The question is were you ever so tempted and so situated, where the opportunities for embezzlement were many and the chances of detection were few? No praise is due the man whose lot has been cast in circumstances where to commit flagrant crimes was an impossibility, but if that same man has yielded to dishonesty in little things, and been unfaithful to the trust reposed in him, he is just as guilty in the sight of heaven, as if he had broken the entire decalogue!

There is no such thing in ordinary circumstances as vaulting into greatness. Birth and fortune do confer artificial distinctions upon some men, but for the most part rather dwarf than inspire noble aspirations after lasting fame. What is so often said about the power of genius is sheer nonsense. Genius in its highest form must pursue certain well-known laws, before the goal is reached. It is by steady industry from moment to moment and hour to hour, that years of labor tell upon a man's life. Of itself a

moment is a little thing, but as related to the individual, it may hold eternity within its grasp. The whole of the future life hinges upon the actions of the present; its consequences reach far beyond the gaze of mortals, and he who is prodigal of moments or fills up these moments with idle gossip or demoralizing vices, fills the bitter cup of future misery and shortens his already too brief span of existence. Nor is there any calling beneath a man's serious regard. The lowest is as necessary as the highest, and in some cases demands a larger measure of fidelity. The switchman upon a railway track, occupies but a humble position, and yet next to the engineer, what situation is more responsible or requires greater watchfulness? The same holds true in every department of labor. This being the case, it is wrong for any man to complain of his calling in life. By all fair means try to improve your position—strive to rise in the scale of intelligence and moral influence, but do not go through the world, complaining and dissatisfied, as if Providence had made a fatal mistake in allotting you a vocation disproportioned to your ability and genius. Do not despise your calling, nor waste precious moments in vain regrets over a matter which is very much in your own hands. Even should you never rise above the humblest occupation, the diligence with which you follow it and the dignity you confer upon it, will more than compensate for the tinsel honors that men sigh for, in more exalted but less useful callings. It will generally be found that the malcontents of society are men who deserved no promotion; who have not been found faithful in the humbler occupations of life and for that reason have never been called to a higher place. Men rise upon present performances, not upon promises of future achievements. The man who has not honestly discharged the duties of the humble

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calling, instead of finding a higher, deserves a lower. It is the declaration alike of Scripture and reason that man should first occupy the lowest seat and then go up higher. The call will come just as soon as he has proved himself capable in the lower sphere.

It is not after all the place that we fill nor the greatness of the influence that we wield that should be taken into account. What is the motive inspiring us to act our part in life, is a question of more importance! Not what is my occupation, but how do I prosecute it! am I a man pleaser—a time-server—an eye-worker, or am I conscientious whether laboring alone, or under the inspection of a superior? You may possess but a single talent, but if that talent is faithfully exercised and improved, your reward is as great as the possessor of ten. You may not have the gift of speech in such measure as to electrify delighted audiences, and sway the passions of your fellow men, but a kind word spoken from a loving heart, exerts an influence beyond conception, and secures for you the approbation of a greater than man. Sew every seam—drive every nail—plane every board—scatter every seed—dig every spadeful of earth as under the inspection of the Omniscient eye. Realize that your work has been allotted you by a wise Providence, who knows your peculiar aptitudes and capabilities. Your duties are important in the carrying out of His gracious plans as much as for the education of your own intellectual and moral powers. As the poet beautifully says:

"To every form of being is assigned * * * an active principle,
In all things, in all natures, in the stars of azure heaven, the un-
enduring clouds

In flower and tree and pebbly stone that paves the brooks
are properties that spread,

Beyond itself, communicating good; from link to link
It circulates the soul of all the world."

Thus every post is a post of honor to him who makes conscience his guide. The soldier on guard as sentinel, is just as usefully employed as in the ranks upon the battle field face to face with the enemy. In digging the trenches, in kindling the camp fires—in throwing up fortifications—in reconnoitring the woods, or in tending the wounded and the dying, he is engaged in service indispensable to victory and equally worthy of commendation and reward.

In creation and providence there are no little things. In the small and tiny creatures of a day's existence, in the meanest flower that grows in the garden, there are proofs of God's infinite wisdom as numerous and as manifest as in the most glorious of His works. Men take the telescope and sweeping along the heavens discover fields of stars—worlds and systems of worlds, that seem but fine dust to the eye of man. Feeling oppressed with a sense of the majesty of the Eternal, they exclaim, "How excellent is thy name in all the earth! who has set thy glory above the heavens." But the microscope reveals as marvellous wonders in the embroidered wing of the butterfly, or the variegated hues of the violet and the daisy. In these "little things," as much as in the greater, the Creator's power and wisdom have been expended, and in the preservation of the lowest of his creatures his goodness is daily seen. If so, why should any man despise his allotted duties, or refuse to prosecute with untiring zeal the employments of the hour? Longfellow, in one of his sweet poems, tells of an honest village blacksmith who from "morn till night" "week in and week out," swung his hammer and blew his bellows for the profit and delight of the school children who gathered round the open door. From his patience and contentment he reads us a valuable lesson:

" His hair is crisp, and black and long,
His face is like the tan,
His brow is wet with honest sweat,
He earns whate'er he can ;
And looks the whole world in the face,
For he owes not any man.

" Toiling—rejoicing—sorrowing,
Onward through life he goes,
Each morning sees some task begun,
Each evening sees it close ;
Something attempted, something done,
Has earned a night's repose.

" Thanks, thanks, to thee, my worthy friend,
For the lesson thou hast taught,
Thus at the flaming forge of life
Our fortunes must be wrought !
Thus on its sounding anvil-shaped
Each burning deed and thought."

PERFECT PEACE.

“Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee.”—Isaiah xxvi, 3.

The chapter from which the text is taken is a song of praise, supposed to be sung by the Jews on their return from captivity. Their hearts are full of gratitude to God for his goodness in restoring them to their beloved land and the privileges of Mount Zion. “In that day,” says the Prophet, “shall this song be sung in the land of Judah: We have a strong city; Salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks.” Jerusalem was considered impregnable to the fiercest attacks of the enemy, but the time was coming when Jehovah, more than ever, would be its guardian and defender. Violence would then no more be heard within the land, nor wasting and destruction within its borders. The Jews emancipated from Babylon are now returning in joy to the capital, and the Prophet commands that the gates may be thrown open for the entrance of the triumphal procession. “Open ye the gates, that the righteous nation, which keepeth the truth, may enter in;” and then follow the words for our present meditation, “Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace (peace, peace, as it is in the original) whose mind is stayed on thee,”—who confides in the God of Jacob and is supported by his Omnipotent arm. The

text evidently has a wider application than to Jerusalem and the Jews. Gospel times are included, and that happy period spoken of in another part of the Prophecy, when the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads, when they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

All God's gifts are perfect, like his own nature. If they are not enjoyed in all their fulness and perfection, the cause lies in the creature, and not in the Creator. The sun always shines, though frequently his splendor is obscured by passing clouds. The water, pure and sparkling at the fountain-head, becomes polluted, as it flows through muddy channels. The likeness, at first faithful and striking, may become effaced and scarred, so as to hide the well-known features. So it is with God's gifts to his fallen creatures. In contact with sinful man they lose their freshness and satisfying power. Hence there is no grace experienced in perfection here, neither peace, nor joy, nor hope, nor patience. At best we but approximate the sinless, happy life of the redeemed in heaven. The believer is like to the traveller standing on some Alpine height, peaceful it may be within himself, but yet within hearing of the echoes from beneath. Although his peace is of the same nature as that which shall be enjoyed in heaven, it cannot produce such exultant joy, as when the soul is set free from the distractions of sense and sin.

Apart from a living Christianity, moulding and regulating the powers and affections of the soul, there is no real peace possible. There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked, nor can there be as long as man and God stand in antagonism. Humanity in the aggregate is like the

troubled ocean. Deep within responds to deep without. The soul of man is the battle-ground of fierce and contending passions. Nay, the very elements of nature are in conflict. The creatures who inhabit the air and sea and earth are in constant warfare. Society heaves with revolutions and insurrections. "Oh, it is a troubled scene! a very sea of troubles which cannot rest, is this visible and sensible world, from the utmost bounds of visions' ken (for the stars themselves are some of them discerned to be in conflagration) to the profoundest deeps of human consciousness, where dwell nothing but broken images of beauty and wild notes of disturbed harmony, and ghastly spectres of departed blessedness, which have in them some witness of a peaceful world which has been lost, and some indistinct promise of a peaceful world to be restored."

To secure some measure of peace, men in all ages have labored earnestly. No means have been left untried, but all endeavors have been fruitless apart from the gospel which pardons guilty man. The great object of Christ's advent was to introduce peace. The angels sang of Him, as a Saviour whose mission was one of peace—a peace to be purchased by his death upon the Cross. Among the many appellations ascribed to God in the Apostolic writings, the "God of peace" occurs most frequently of all. Paul, in closing his letters to the early churches frequently prays that "grace and peace" from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, may be upon them all, and Christ himself makes over to his disciples this same peace spoken of in the text. "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you. Not as the world giveth, give I unto you. These things have I spoken unto you that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation, but be not afraid I have overcome the world."

What is the nature of this peace spoken of in the text?

It is called perfect peace. Elsewhere "the peace of God which passeth all understanding," implying *that it is divine in its origin*. It is the same kind of peace which he himself enjoys, and imparts to his children by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Sometimes it is called the peace of God and at other times the gift of Christ, inasmuch as it comes to us through the atonement of Calvary, whereby Christ made reconciliation between God and man. "He is our peace, who hath made both one, and now in Christ Jesus, we who were sometime afar off, are made nigh, by the blood of Christ." It is a new principle infused into the believer's soul, which harmonizes and regulates all his inner nature; it gives the power of self-conquest and restraint—of subjugation and victory over earth-born passions and unholy aspirations. *It is constant*; not fitful or spasmodic, but perennial. Like our atmosphere which girdles the globe, so this peace pervades all the secret recesses of the soul. It is peace upon peace, like the waves of the sea, following each other without intermission or cessation. In times of momentary fear, this peace of God becomes a refuge where the Christian always finds security and rest. *And it is lasting—permanent*, up to the hour of death. It not only accompanies the believer through the manifold changes and trials of life, but it calms his spirit in the hour of dissolution. Well may the Apostle say that this peace passeth understanding. Mind cannot conceive its unspeakable blessedness, nor tongue of man describe it. It is like the love of Christ which passeth knowledge. "Like the stillness of the caverns in the depths of the sea, where the mariner's bones lie undisturbed—where pearls are born and corals that never see the light; where the long lost gold and silver of the merchants lie sprinkled on the sandy floor;

down in the rock caves and the silent palaces of darkness where waves dash not, and the intruding foot of the diver never hath trodden; so clear, so calm is the peace of God—the placid rest of the believer. Like the quietness of the silent stars, like the noiseless highway of those noiseless orbs, that sleep upon their golden couches, or only open their bright eyes to keep watch upon that stormless sea of ether, and guard the solemn boundaries of the realm of peace, such is the peace and calm that reigns in the Christian's bosom." As the poet beautifully paraphrases the words of our text:

" Quiet as a peaceful river,
 Quiet as the wind-hushed seas;
 In Jehovah trusting ever,
 We are kept in perfect peace.
 I'll not ask Thee what Thou doest,
 Whatsoever it be, 'tis right,
 Thou, our friend, of friends the truest,
 Wilt sustain 'midst storm and night.

Deep beneath the warring ocean,
 Deep beneath the howling flood;
 All unmoved by the commotion,
 Lie the promises of God.
 We are anchored firmly to them,
 Though in tatters hang our shroud's;
 Calmly we look up, and through them,
 View the thunder-riven clouds.

This is *not mental indolence*. It is not inactivity or stagnation of mind. It is not a peace arising from selfish gratification. It is not the peace of the sensualist who drowns to-morrow's cares, in present riot; nor is it cessation from the labors and anxieties of life, but it is the harmonious working of all our powers, fitting alike for the right discharge of duty in the world, and for progress in the divine life. It is attained, as the text tells us, by having the mind stayed upon God; implying fixedness—repose—a

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constant looking towards God. "My heart is fixed," says the Psalmist. As the astronomer, with unwearied patience looks out on the horizon with his telescope, for some star as yet undiscovered, so does the believing soul stay itself upon almighty love. The man who thus trusts in God, gives himself up entirely to the guidance of his Saviour. *It is not mere faith*, but the out-growth of faith. There is implicit confidence in a presiding Providence, who knows our every want and has promised to satisfy these wants as they arise. Thus this perfect peace produces unqualified submission and resignation to the will of heaven, under dark and mysterious dispensations, which cannot be solved by human reason. Trusting in the promise, that "all things work together for good to them that love God," the soul can rest unconcernedly in all the appointments of heaven, as the voyager upon the ocean sleeps fearlessly, under the protection and guidance of tried and trusty mariners.

This peace keeps the heart. "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace." The peace of God, says the Apostle, shall keep your hearts and minds. The idea is that of perfect security. As in a strong fortress, there is safety from danger, so this peace of God "garrisons" the heart of the believer, and makes him altogether independent of human assistance. The Bible is full of such language. "The Lord is thy keeper." "He that keepeth thee will not slumber." "Behold I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places, whither thou goest." "He shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways." "Holy father, keep through thine own name, those whom thou hast given me." There is something exceedingly tender and comforting in the very language. It comes home to the heart of every one, who has any experience whatever of the weakness of human nature. It implies watchfulness—

vigilance—perfect immunity from sudden evil, just such incessant care, as the mother exercises over her helpless child by day and by night. In every change of earthly condition and in every reverse of fortune, the heart is sustained and comforted by the presence of Jehovah. Neither fears nor cares can wound the heart, where dwells the peace of God.

Without such a promise, the life of the believer upon earth would frequently be sad indeed. For nowhere is there the promise of exemption from common or special calamities which are the lot of God's children, beyond that of other men. Many men indeed enjoy great external prosperity, while destitute of inward peace. But the Christian called to endure affliction, in his own person and in his family, is sustained and rendered heroic by this divine grace. Beneath the waves and billows of affliction, which distress the outer life, the heart, remains calm and tranquil in the enjoyment of God's favor. Happiness depends very much upon outward circumstances, and is variable and changeable. True peace rests on the unchanging love of God, which is imperishable and unvarying. "Happiness is like the rainbow, with many colors, beautiful and brilliant; its magnificent arch appears to be firmly based upon the everlasting hills and able to support the sky. Its form and beauty triumph for a time over the hurricane, while it reposes in peace upon the bosom of the dark thundercloud. Yet in a moment it vanishes. But Divine peace is like the sun, which hidden it may be by the cloud and storm, is nevertheless reposing behind them all in the serene heavens, and comes forth at last when the rainbow has passed away, to shine on, filling the world with light and life."

There are other kinds of peace in our world, but all are merely temporary and unreliable, save the peace which God

bestows upon the pardoned soul. There is a false peace, that gives present, momentary relief from life's burdens,—there may be moral insensibility, a deadness of conscience, and reckless indifference to the future; but it is only for a short season that such a state of things can last. Afterwards there follows inconceivable agony and mental torture in another and an unchanging state of existence beyond the grave. Satan whispers "peace, peace," when there is, and can be no peace to the wicked. Frequently indeed, men, when drawing near the close of life, find when too late, that they have been resting upon such occasional experiences as grounds of hope; instead of that peace which flows to guilty man from the cross of Christ. Then they realize, that there is nothing that can stand the test of affliction, or give strength and consolation to the despairing soul, or help the sinner to grapple successfully with the King of Terrors, but the peace of God which passeth understanding—that perfect peace, which keeps the heart of the man who is stayed upon God.

Now *the first and most important* of all questions, that every one should endeavour intelligently and honestly to answer is, Do I possess this Divine peace? and back of this there is the other question, Have I come to the blood of sprinkling? Has there been the application to my soul, by the Holy Spirit, of those heavenly influences, which accompany true conversion? Am I at peace with God and man? Am I still under the power of an accusing conscience, or have I the assurance that reconciled to God, I am henceforth free from those fears and terrors that haunt the guilty and unsaved? It is good to find peace in the hour of death, but it is better far to have it in the time of health. To possess a mind composed and tranquil in every emergency;

to lean upon an unseen arm when all human support fails us; to rest in God when the world becomes tasteless and insipid; to anchor the soul within the veil, when storms and tempests rage around and beat upon our frail earthly tabernacle—is the most blessed of all experiences on this side the grave. Such a peace indeed, the world cannot give and cannot take away. Like a day of clear sunshine and balmy zephyrs, after a dreary night of storm and tempest—the heavens dark and the stars invisible—while the forked and fiery lightnings flashed hither and thither to the music of successive thunder-peals, so is the peace of God to the terror-stricken soul. As soon as the soul finds Christ, the passions are hushed to silence. That voice that spake into silence the stormy sea of Galilee, can alone bring peace and comfort to anxious, weary souls.

I freely grant you, that this peace of God in its most perfect form, is not all at once enjoyed by many of God's saints. Years have to elapse before their minds are filled with hope and joy in believing. And many diverse agencies are frequently employed, to bring the soul to rest implicitly upon the rock of ages, without misgivings and distrust. But sooner or later in every case the promise of the text is verified. It matters not indeed how such a blessed peace is reached—whether by painful discipline—bodily affliction—unexpected reverses and misfortunes, or severe bereavements. The return of health to the languid body, is often preceded by painful convulsions and excruciating agony. So oftentimes God produces this inner peace and implicit confidence in his dealings with individual souls, by weary days and years of bitter disappointment.

" By the thorn road and none other
Is the Mount of Vision won.
Tread it without shrinking, Brother,
Jesus trod it—pass thou on !"

There are some here who know nothing of this peace. The inner disquiet and agitation reveals itself in their very countenances. To them the Sabbath is but a lull between the agitated and feverish excitement of one week and another ; not the precursor and sweet harbinger of eternal peace in Heaven. Explain your anxieties and troubles and restless moments as you may, it all comes directly or indirectly from the unsatisfactory relations that exist between you and God. Until you are at peace with him, you cannot enjoy peace in any condition of life. All earthly substitutes for divine peace are worthless. "Acquaint now thyself with him and be at peace, thereby good shall come unto thee." It is because man has voluntarily divorced himself from God that there is so little true happiness and contentment in the world. Peace cannot be enjoyed so long as he remains alienated from his maker. The great design of God in the gift of Christ was to end this state of enmity and alienation and reconcile earth and heaven. Everything has been done on the part of the Almighty, that guilty man may enjoy true peace and all other blessings which accompany a sense of pardon. O ! ye weary, restless, guilty souls—nervous and miserable while living and terrified at the thought of dying, return to the only source of lasting peace. The door of mercy is open, the hand of mercy is outstretched, the voice of welcome is in your ears. Make the covenant of peace with your Maker *now*. The intercessor stands ready to plead your cause. God is willing to accept his plea on your behalf. " Kiss the son, lest he be angry and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kin-

dled but a little. Blessed are they that put their trust in him." And now, may "the God of peace, that brought again from the dead Our Lord Jesus Christ, that Great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you, that which is well-pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen."

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"Then he said unto them, go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared : for this day is holy unto our Lord : neither be ye sorry : for the joy of the Lord is your strength."—Nehemiah, 8, v. 10.

It is very difficult for us to realize the feelings of the Jews, when these words were addressed them. Indeed it seems at first sight entirely out of keeping with the circumstances in which they were placed, to enjoin them to refrain from tears, to banish every element of sorrow, to forget the past, and indulge in joy and gladness. Although once more settled in Jerusalem, the scenes and associations of former days, which crowded upon the memory, were more powerful to produce sadness, than their present blessings were calculated to cause unmingled joy. As when they sat by the rivers of Babylon they felt unable to sing the Lord's song, so now restored to Jerusalem, the songs of Zion could only be sung in the minor key :—unlike former days, when the great congregation in tones of triumph and with a sound like the rushing of many waters, lifted up their voices in gratitude and praise.

A few sentences of history are necessary to place us in accord with the condition of the Jews, when these words

were spoken. The seventy years' captivity were now ended. Cyrus, many years before, prompted by the Most High, had given forth his proclamation, permitting them to return and rebuild the desolations of Mount Zion and the Holy place. In obedience to this proclamation and doubtless in accordance with the natural desires of their heart, Zerubbabel, accompanied by the chiefs of the fathers of Judah and the Priests and Levites, went up to Jerusalem and began the work. The envy and hatred of the Samaritans soon brought operations to a close, and for twenty years—until the decree of Darius was promulgated, the work remained unfinished;—the temple was completed, but the walls of Jerusalem remained a mournful desolation. Fifty years after this, Artaxerxes sent Ezra the Priest with presents for the temple and letters of favor to the Governors of the land, and twelve years after this, Nehemiah followed, to restore the walls of Jerusalem to something of their original glory. The difficulties of the undertaking are fully and graphically narrated in this book:—how that the builders every one, wrought at the walls with the weapon in the one hand and the sword in the other;—how that Sanballat and Tobiah and Geshem, attempted once and again, by cunning craftiness and professions of friendship and threatenings of evil, to divert them from their purpose, and how that Nehemiah responded to all their overtures;—“I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down.” Finally after a period of ninety years, Jerusalem was restored and the temple furnished for the service of the Lord.

And now, for the first time after the long silence of some hundred and fifty years, Nehemiah and Ezra assemble the people to hear the words of the law. Ezra the

Priest, we are told, gathered all the people to the water-gate of the city, and there on a pulpit of wood, which they had made for the purpose, opened the Book of Moses, in the sight of all the people, and read it to such as could understand. Strange and conflicting feelings filled the minds of the congregation on that occasion. Doubtless they felt grateful that God in his mercy had spared them to see such a day; that the desire of their hearts had been fulfilled, and the visible ordinances of the sanctuary once more set up in their midst. But there were other feelings of a less gladsome character. As they listened to the Law of Moses, the recollection of their past sins and shortcomings flashed upon the memory. The sad departure of the nation from Jehovah, which had brought upon them the judgments of heaven and the seventy years' captivity; and the testimony of their conscience, that the retribution they had suffered was at once merciful and righteous;—such thoughts filled their hearts with sorrow and dimmed their eyes with tears, "so that all the people wept, when they heard the words of the law." The goodness of God had moved them to penitence for their own and the sins of their fathers, so that while glad at heart for the completion of the work, they were sad and silent in view of the memories of the past. It was in such circumstances that these words of tender and loving rebuke were spoken: "Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared: for the day is holy unto our Lord: neither be ye sorry: for the joy of the Lord is your strength."

There was great wisdom manifested in Nehemiah's action. Weeping was all very well for a time. Sorrow and sadness of heart were eminently becoming in the cir-

cumstances in which they were placed, but only as the precursors and enhancers of their joy. It would never do to give way entirely to grief. They must not become paralyzed or faint hearted, while so much important and pressing work remained before them. Although the temple had been rebuilt and Jerusalem's walls restored, the entire civil and ecclesiastical polity of the nation needed readjustment and organization;—the scattered tribes must be gathered back again and the national bond of unity publicly ratified and sealed. In some respects, this was a more difficult work than the rebuilding of the walls, demanding courage, patience, unflagging perseverance, wise counsels, and hopeful spirits. It would never be accomplished if they sat down and wept over the irrevocable past: tears and lamentations were out of place at such a time. As the people of God, having passed under the rod and received anew into the bond of the covenant, they were called to a nobler exhibition of faith and heroism;—to act the part of men, and overcome the despondency and downward tendencies of their present condition. The sources of joy and strength which were open to them, warranted a different kind of conduct, and these were amply sufficient to meet every emergency and help in every strait.

It has been truly remarked, that sorrow of a certain kind and of a certain degree is not only salutary but inspiring; and that there is but a very narrow bridge between excessive joy and excessive grief. Often indeed they are intermingled, the one becoming the supplement of the other—as the Apostle says:—"Sorrowing yet always rejoicing." Trials and hardships, while they clothe the soul in gloom, at the same time inspire it with a vigour and ruggedness, which continued prosperity and gladness can

never furnish. When like the Jews of old we reflect upon our past history—whether it be as part of the great world that lies under condemnation, or as individual transgressors of God's holy law in our daily practice—we cannot but grieve and sorrow, before that feelings of joy possess the soul. "When we think of the light that faith casts upon our condition, upon our nature, upon our responsibilities, upon our sins and upon our destinies, we can easily see, that if gladness be one part of its operation, no less really and truly is sadness another." But while this is true, it is none the less certain, that joy should be the normal characteristic of all God's children, and that just in proportion as it is possessed and cultivated, will be our spiritual strength and our attainments in divine things.

The text then teaches what Solomon elsewhere laconically remarks, that there is a time to weep and a time to laugh—a time to mourn and a time to dance; in other words, that in the Christian life, there is a certain fitness of things to be observed, as in the common concerns of life. A marriage supper is an occasion for joy; the sad offices that attend the dying and the dead, call for other and different feelings. A soul under convictions of sin, but as yet with no saving recognition of the overflowing mercy of God, and personal assurance of its safety in Christ, cannot rejoice as that man, who is conscious of pardoned sin and grasps firmly the title deeds of the heavenly inheritance. In other words, true believers have no business to give way to systematic sorrow. Doubts and perplexities may for a time encompass them, but as years roll on, they should rest with a confidence upon the promises of an infinite God, that puts to flight all unworthy suspicions of his continued love.

Such statements imply that all kinds of joy are neither stimulating nor strengthening. There is a flippant, giddy, shallow, because earthborn joy, that enfeebles, dissipates and undermines a man's moral being, unfitting him for his destiny here and hereafter. Unhallowed pleasures,—wild outbursts of unbridled revelry,—produce a momentary gladness of heart, but intensify pangs of remorse and misery in the future. Such gleams of joy are well likened to flowers which grow on the edge of a dark volcano, which awakens in lurid glare and thunder, when the excitement of the occasion has passed away and distracts repose. They are the product of passion when unguarded by reason, and are as inevitably followed by the bitterness of despair, as the thunder peal succeeds the lightning flash!

It is time now to speak affirmatively of what this joy is, and of the nature of that strength it is capable of furnishing the believer. Joy is a motion scarcely definable. It is the outward expression of a delightful frame of mind, arising from the present or assured possession of good. It may be felt in the heart without the external evidence, but rarely is it so. When a man feels happy, it is generally shown in the outward life. Joy is the emotion of gladness in a higher degree, because proceeding from a more important cause. It is also distinguishable from mere mirth and frivolity, inasmuch as it always has respect to good. Christian joy can scarcely be described. The Bible gives us no abstract definition. It commands Christians to be joyful, confident that the feeling will always be present, if men are, what the Scriptures enjoin them to be. If therefore we do not more or less frequently, experience this delightful emotion, it must be, that our hearts and lives are out of tune.

No command is more habitually disregarded by Christians. Religion seems in the estimation of many good people, something that is gloomy—austere and sad; incompatible with joy either expressed or felt. A Christian who is habitually joyful is regarded as a wonder. Men single him out for study. They do not expect piety and cheerfulness united in the same man. Young Christians particularly, who give way to their feelings and emotions, are the objects of suspicion. Christian joy and delight are thus as effectually banished from our homes and churches, as in the days of monasticism and asceticism, when men sought deserts and caverns to escape society, and avoid intercourse with the world.

All this is in direct violation of the spirit of Christianity. Joy is not simple a permissible emotion,—something that a man may indulge in occasionally without actual sin, but is a positive duty. It is not meant to be an embellishment,—but an essential characteristic of every child of God. It is to be sought after and cultivated, as much as any other grace. When the angels announced the Saviour's advent to the world, it was in joyous strains, and God intends that believers should perpetuate this joy, until the strains of the church on earth blend with the melody of the redeemed in heaven.

Notice, 1st—*It is the joy of the Lord*: peculiar to no dispensation and belonging to no special race;—as accessible to us now as to the Jews of old. Christianity indeed is susceptible of affording us a higher and purer kind of joy than did the Old Testament economy. They only knew of Mount Sinai, with its tempests and thunders—we stand under the shadow of Mount Calvary, with its burning tones of love. They rejoiced because the Babylonish Cap-

tivity was ended,—we rejoice because deliverance from the power and consequences of sin has been effected. They were glad because the temple was rebuilt and the walls of Jerusalem restored—we cherish similar feelings, because the Heavenly temple has been prepared for us and our Great High Priest within the veil advocates our cause. Why then should the children of a King, “go mourning all their days?” Rather should we sing as we journey Canaanward;

“Shout ye little flock and blest
Soon you'll enter into rest;
There your seat is now prepared,
There your Kingdom and reward.

“Fear not Brethren, joyful stand
On the borders of your land;
Jesus Christ, our Father's son
Bids us undismayed, go on.”

The object of this joy then is, not this world, nor the things in the world, but God himself. “Delight thyself *in God.*” “Ye righteous rejoice *in the Lord*,—sing aloud unto God our strength, make a joyful noise unto the God of Jacob.” “Though the fig tree shall not blossom, neither fruit be on the vines, the labour of the olive fail,—the fields yield no meat,—the flocks be cut off from the fold, and there be no herds in the stall, yet will I rejoice in the Lord,—I will joy in the God of my salvation.” That God should be the object of the believers rejoicing, is surely not wonderful. Men of the world indite poems and wreath the brow of conquerors in token of a nation's gratitude. But Christ has secured for the believer not only present blessedness, but the hope of eternal happiness beyond the grave. He has ransomed him from the curse of a broken law, redeemed him from the bondage of

sin, brought him up out of the horrible pit and the miry clay, sent the Holy Spirit to sanctify and cleanse his nature, caused him to sing songs in the dark night of sorrow, and made over to him an inalienable right to eternal mansions above!

Secondly—*God is the source of this joy.* It is a fruit of the spirit. "The kingdom of God is righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace." Sometimes this joy comes unexpectedly. Often in the midst of our worldly employments, there are unaccountable gleams of heavenly joy that break in upon the soul,—visions of glory that ravish and support the heart. These moments of exultation are due to the direct operations of the Spirit. More frequently this joy comes through the use of means, and connected with other spiritual emotions. It is inseparable from love, for where the love of God is shed abroad in the heart, joy springs up like fountains in the desert. It is also a result of faith, for when faith lays hold upon Christ, there is joy unspeakable and full of glory.

It is worthy of notice, how much of true joy mingled in all the services of the temple and tabernacle of old. The young converts in the early church, always manifested their gladness by acts of praise. The primitive Christians were full of joy. In public and in private—in the family and in the market place, they gave unmistakable evidence of the joy that filled their hearts. So should Christians at the present day. If our Christianity does not produce cheerfulness and rejoicing, it is so far as we are concerned a dead religion. If in coming Sabbath after Sabbath to the house of God, we do not find our hearts enlarged, and can say with the pious Jew of old, "We were glad when it

was said unto us, Go ye up to the house of the Lord :—" let us tremble for our faith !

The human voice and countenance are the exponents of Christian joy. These constitute the dial plate, upon which we are to mark the otherwise concealed operations of the Holy Spirit. In the congregation of God's saints, there should be great joy and rejoicing. Our inward joy is only valuable in so far as it is manifested. Where vital religion flourishes, the preaching of the word is always accompanied with gladness. In all ages of the church, from the period of the Reformation down to the days of Whitfield, and Wesley, and Edwards, revivals of religion have been invariably marked by a revival of the praise and devotions of God's people.

Thirdly—*This joy of the Lord is altogether independent of outward circumstances.* The changes that take place in our condition—the reverses and bereavements that are interjected in our history, may to some extent moderate and tranquillize our joy, but cannot extinguish it. Herein lies the difference between natural gladness and spiritual joy. The former may be innocent enough and useful enough to oil the machinery of life, but it depends upon contingencies. It rises or falls according as prosperity or adversity fills our cup. It is with mere natural joy as it is with the water in our pitchers after a night of intense and bitter cold. In the evening when we retire to rest, the water is liquid, pure and sparkling; but during the night it becomes frigid and hard as rock, and useless for the ordinary purposes of life. So in many cases, a single night of wordly misfortune banishes the merry laugh and ends the innocent pastime of the worldling. Not so with the joy of the Lord. It can flourish under the most depressing and saddening condi-

tions of existence. The dark gloomy prison cell cannot expel it—the martyr's fire but causes it to leap forth with supernatural fervour.

It is not meant that the Christian has no moments of sorrow. The Bible, which is the record of the saints' experience, has in it a great deal of lamentation. There are wailings of broken hearts and half-stifled sobs. This in many cases, is the first experience of the believer. It comes from sin and the corruption of our nature. So long as we are in the world, we must have occasionally such sorrowful experiences. The brightest sky has its passing cloud; the ocean when most tranquil has its ripples, if not its waves and billows. The Christian, even in moments of joy, has sorrow. But in the midst of heaviness he can rejoice. On the surface of his life, there may be dark rolling billows, but in the depths of his soul there is unearthly peace. Like David, he is at times away down in the valley of despondency; at other times, like the disciples on the mount of Transfiguration;—lingering corruption—fightings within and fightings without—a desire to be free from sin, and the natural inability to rise superior to its downward tendencies—all these things produce sorrow. But on the other hand, the love of God in Christ—the revealed truths of redemption, the consolations which flow from the care and guidance of an ever present Saviour, produce joy in the darkest and most trying hours. This joy does not abandon the believer at a certain stage of his journey, but remains with him to the close. In sickness and in health, in prosperity and in adversity, in life and in death it is a constant companion. It buds in the grave and blossoms in eternity. On his way to the scaffold and the flames, he can sing songs of victory. The reflected

brightness of heaven's glory, lightens the dark valley of death's shadow, helping him to say, "I will fear no evil." "The Lord is my light and salvation, whom shall I fear?"

Fourthly—*This joy of the Lord is a source of strength.* It is a valuable auxiliary in the Christian life. It helps us to engage successfully in our master's work. It is not only a sweet antidote to the cares for life, but it makes the soul buoyant, vigorous and lion-hearted. It enables the believer to say in confidence of victory, "who art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain. Who hath despised the day of small things? The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundations of this house—his hands shall finish it." Hopefulness and joy are the great stimulants of existence. The mind is the great propelling force in life, and can make the weak and shrivelled body triumphantly overcome the most formidable obstacles. It is not muscular force that rules the world, but the electric spark that fires the brain. Hopeful sunny natures can thus accomplish more work and do it better, than those who dwell within the confines of their own memory, and lament a past that never returns. God's work may either be drudgery or unspeakable delight according to our feelings. With hearts full of love—with supports of grace now and anticipations of glory beyond, labor of the hardest kind is easy and self-denial pleasant. Can you tell me, said George Stephenson, the great engineer, to Buckland the Geologist,—as a railway train flashed along, tossing behind it's long white plume of steam—what is the power that is driving that train? I suppose said the Geologist, it is one of your big engines. But what drives the engine? Oh, very likely a Newcastle driver. What do you say to the light of the sun replied

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the great engineer? It is nothing else than light bottled up in the earth for ten thousands of years, and now after being buried for long ages in fields of coal, that light is again brought forth and liberated, and made to work as in the locomotive, for great human purposes." And so in the spiritual world, sunbeams of divine love, and rays of divine grace from the sun of righteousness bless mankind and glorify God.

Christian joy should be cultivated, because of *its effects upon the Believer himself*. Trials and crosses are easily borne when joy dwells in the heart. Those who are always clothed in sackcloth go through life very miserable indeed. Soldiers who go into the fight with despondent, anxious hearts, full of fears and misgivings as to the issue of the conflict, are very apt to fail and fall. As cheerfulness and elasticity of spirit are of the greatest value in the commonest affairs of life, so spiritual joy is of the greatest importance in the kingdom of God upon the earth. Such a frame of mind produces alacrity and activity in God's service. It imparts vigor to the soul. It casts off unnecessary cares and tormenting distractions—it keeps the heart warm and the head clear. The soul thus anointed works without constraint or reluctance, and the most laborious duties become pleasant and attractive.

It should also be cultivated, because *it attracts the world to the religion of Christ*. It commends true piety. It draws men not simply towards Christian society, but eventually leads them to the Saviour himself. When ungodly men see Christian cheerfulness manifested, not only in periods of unbroken prosperity, but when crosses and disappointments abound in the Christian's lot; when they

see the face radiant with joy and the tongue vocal with praise, they naturally enquire what causes so singular an exhibition of gladness, lifting the soul beyond the regions of doubt, despair, and despondency, into the clear sunlight of unclouded hope.

In prospect of once more sitting at the table of the Lord, let us take these words as a directory for our conduct.* We cannot altogether on such an occasion shut out gloomy thoughts. The remembrance of individual unworthiness, and of private and public sins, oftentimes robs the believer of much enjoyment. There is also the saddening thought that every communion season finds a change in the membership, some having left for that higher temple,

“Where congregations ne’er break up
And Sabbaths have no end.”

I can easily understand that at the dedication of the second temple, many of those present thought of those who had taken part in the dedication of the first, and those who had died far away from the land and the city they loved so fondly, and were no longer present to share their new-found joy. Kindred thoughts oppress the child of God on sacramental seasons. But we must not yield to them overmuch. The day, the occasion, the table, are holy unto the Lord. It is no time for tears, nor mere idle lamentation. It is a time for sanctified mirth, for saintly fellowship, for the appropriation of those rich and precious graces which the Master has prepared for His people. As you take your places at the table, say :

“Come and o’ershadow with thy power,
This lonely heart of mine,
And feed me in this solemn hour,
With thine own bread and wine.

*Communion Sabbath, May 16th, 1875.

GOD'S HIDDEN ONES.

"Thy hidden ones."—Psalms lxxxiii, v. 3.

It is literally as well as figuratively true, that in many periods of the church's history. God's people have been hidden ones. During the fearful persecutions of the first three centuries, the little band of Christians lived from year to year in dark sepulchral chambers scooped out of the solid rock. Apart from the world of living men, and under the busy streets of Rome, the Catacombs provided at one and the same time a hiding place for the living and a resting place for the dead. Here, by torch light, they sang hymns of praise, and engaged in the most solemn acts of worship. Here generation after generation of suffering saints were prepared for the glorious rewards awaiting those who, through much tribulation, enter into the kingdom. During the period of the dark ages also, when spiritual darkness and mental torpor overspread the world, the Waldenses were similarly hidden from their cruel persecutors in the Alpine valleys. And during the terrible bloodshed of the covenanting period, the best of Scotland's sons and daughters sought refuge from a brutal soldiery in dark ravines and under frowning precipices, where human foot had never trod. There the sounds of prayer and praise were often heard under cover of the night. There strong men wrestled with God, for the deliverance of their

down-trodden country, and there upon the lonely moor, once and again, their warm blood dyed the heather. There these hidden ones of God "with the stars sailing overhead as silent witnesses of their devotion and their wrongs," and "the night winds sighing round the mountain, or howling through the rugged glen, wafting the echo of their praise in circling strains to heaven," held communion with their God and defied the rage of man

The Psalm in which these words are found speaks of the Israelites as "God's hidden ones." In many respects they were so. Their whole history as a nation is marked by instances of God's protection and unfailing goodness. The Psalm is supposed to have been composed in the reign of Jehosaphat, when several of the Canaanitish nations, not yet exterminated, conspired for the overthrow of the Jewish Commonwealth. It reminds God of his relation to his covenant people and calls upon him to vindicate their cause in the dispersion of their enemies. The language indicates long silence on the part of Jehovah; a holding back as it were, from interfering with the designs of the crafty heathen. "Hold not thy peace, and be not still, O God. For lo thine enemies make a tumult! and they that hate thee have lifted up the Head. They have taken crafty counsel against thy people, and consulted against thy *hidden ones*." At the same time the writer never loses his confidence in the power and readiness of Jehovah to grant the deliverance sought, and confound the troublers of his servants. Accordingly, ere the Psalm closes he seems to realize the answer to his prayer, when they shall be scattered like stubble before the wind, burned up as the flames consume the forest, and affrighted with the tempest of God's wrath. Then it shall be seen, says

the Psalmist, that Jehovah rules the earth, and will to the utmost defend his "hidden ones."

We may enlarge the original application of the term, and regard it as descriptive of all God's spiritual Israelites. By so doing we shall arrive at a conception of the blessedness of those who are Christ's "hidden ones." This is but one of the many striking terms of endearment applied in Scripture to the Church and people of God, indicating how tenderly they are cared for, and how highly they are valued by their Redeemer. They are his peculiar people—his peculiar treasure—his jewels; they are precious—kept—set apart. Each of these terms denotes some special aspects of the believer's character and condition as related to his Lord, while collectively they embrace all that he needs in his Christian experience for the perfection of his happiness and the advancement of his spiritual and eternal welfare.

Among other truths the words suggest the following :—Believers are hidden from eternity in the purpose of God. "Whom he did foreknow, he also predestinated to be conformed to the image of his son; whom he did predestinate, them he also called; and whom he called, them he also justified, and whom he justified, them he also glorified." The purpose of God in the case of every believer is his final salvation. We need not occupy space in attempting to prove a doctrine, that lies on almost every page of the New Testament Scriptures, and specially in the apostolic writings. Foreknown, predestinated, called, ordained to eternal life—chosen in him from the foundation of the world;—such are the terms used, in speaking of the safety of God's peo-

ple. We may quibble as we may at such statements, and bring our poor reason to explain them away, in accordance with other theories—false and unscriptural—though more palatable to the human heart, but “the foundation of God standeth sure, the Lord knoweth them that are his.” Electing love from eternity determined that through the suffering and death of Christ his sons and daughters should be brought home to glory, not because of any faith or holiness foreseen in the creature, but according to the good pleasure of his will, wherein we are accepted in the Beloved. And in order to carry out this eternal purpose, God entered into covenant with his son;—the son undertaking to assume our nature—to die, and by overcoming death glorify the perfections of the Godhead and meet all demands against the sinner, and God the Father accepting the sacrifice and perfect righteousness of Christ as payment in full of all the debt incurred by his fallen, but elect people. Such are the teachings of Scripture on this point, and thus we are warranted in saying that believers are “hidden ones”—hidden from all eternity in the purpose of God. His love for them never had a beginning, and never can have an end. Long before angels sang creation’s praises, or stars begemmed the sky, or the bond of promise spanned the firmament, did God record in the book of life, the names of his children. Herein lies the safety and certainty of the believer’s future. The covenant of grace cannot be broken. The purpose of God cannot be annulled. Those, says Christ, that the Father hath given me, no man can pluck out of my hand. Heaven and earth may pass away and generations come and go, but the “hidden ones” of God are eternally secured in the possession of their covenant rights.

Thus hidden in the purpose of God, believers have by faith laid hold on eternal life. They have fled for refuge to the hope set before them in the Gospel. Faith is the act of the soul, whereby Christ becomes all in all to the awakened sinner, whereby he finds a hiding place in the city of refuge, and obtains possession of the purchased inheritance. It is spoken of in Scripture under different figures, but in every instance oneness with Christ is implied. It is not the clinging of the tendrils around the support, or the clasping of the ivy to the ruin, so much as the vital union of the tree and the branches, implying identity of interest and life. Christ dwells in the believer and the believer in Christ: They are one as the Father and Christ are one. Their life is hid with Christ in God. They live because he lives. All their spiritual power and vitality are derived from Christ, through the operation of the spirit. They have put on Christ and are conformed to his image, and are thus so closely related and united to him that we can scarcely think of the one without remembering the other.

This is the completion of the believer's redemption, the consummation in his actual experience of what was purposed in eternity. Brought to see his wretchedness out of Christ, he has sought and found true peace in believing. He is no longer afraid of the condemnation, for his surety has met all demands. He is no longer terrified at the thought of guilt, for he stands clothed in the righteousness of Christ. He is no longer careful to defend himself against the accusations of God's holy law, for he has committed his case to an all-prevailing Advocate and Intercessor. He no longer fears death or the grave, for having died with Christ, and risen to newness of life, he shall eventually rise with Him in the resurrection of the

just. Thus, "hidden" in Christ, he can triumphantly say, "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth,—who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea, rather is risen." "The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life, of whom shall I be afraid?"

Believers are also hidden during life from the observation and knowledge of the world. This arises from a variety of causes. The large portion of God's chosen ones are poor and obscure, so far as regards their social position. Not many of the wise and mighty and noble are called. God hath chosen the poor of this world, rich in faith, to be heirs of the Kingdom. It seems to be the will of heaven that the pearl of great price should most frequently be found by those who are destitute of earthly riches; and although their labors in Christ's cause may be abundant, and their sacrifices vast, in proportion to their means, their actual accomplishments are unknown to the world. It does not recognize the marks of true discipleship—it knows them not, just as it knew not Christ. They are also hidden because of their natural temperament and disposition. They prefer retirement, they seek seclusion. They have no relish for what the world calls "fashionable society." They instinctively shrink from notice and regard. The mountain top and the valley—the closet and the family prayer-meeting, are their familiar haunts, and not the more public assemblages of their fellow men. They are timid, diffident and reserved—sometimes beyond what the cause of Christ demands, and their own growth in grace requires,—but otherwise they cannot be. Sensitive plants, they close at the approach of

the rude material world, and thrive best in loneliness and in the shade. They are still further hidden and unrecognized because of their insignificant numbers compared with the mass of ungodly men. They are, and always have been, a little flock. In the days preceding the flood, Noah and his family alone of all the antediluvian world maintained the worship of the true God and the practice of piety. Not even ten God-fearing men could be found in Sodom; and in the days of our Saviour, how few there were that followed the disciples, and espoused His cause! It is even so still. Looking at men in general, and taking account simply of the surface of society, how little vital religion seems to exist. One is almost led to despair, like Elijah, for the existence of true religion and the success of the Gospel against such fearful odds. But "hidden ones" there are, whose names and characters are well known to God. Their number will astonish God's own servants in the day of reckoning and recompense. Not only from Christian lands and from the membership of Christian Churches shall the elect "hidden ones" be gathered, but from the dark and benighted regions of the globe, and the far-off islands of the sea.

Finally, God's children are "hidden," while in this world, from the terrible calamities and judgments that fall upon ungodly men. In many cases, it is true that believers suffer greater trials than other men. The wicked flourish, while the Christian is lashed by the storms of adversity. It is not by exemption from suffering that God's "hidden ones" are known, but rather by the accumulation of their griefs and sorrows. "Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth." But sufferings in the case of a good man are real blessings;

while the judgments that come upon the wicked are the outpourings of God's anger. From the latter God's people are wholly exempted. In the night when the destroying angel passed over the land of Egypt, the houses of the Israelites were spared. The seal of the covenant, the blood of the Paschal lamb, marked the inmates as special favorites of heaven. And so it is still, when God's scourges and plagues pass over the world. When the antediluvian world was destroyed by the flood, God put Noah in the ark and shut him in. When the wicked Sodomites would have dragged forth Lot to certain death, the angels drew him in, and smote the men with blindness. When Pharaoh and the host of Egypt were drowned in the waters of the sea, the vast army of the Israelites passed through on dry ground to the other side. Although Providence is often mysterious, and God's dispensations are frequently inscrutable to saint and sinner, there are nevertheless striking differences which all men recognize. Centuries ago Solomon declared this universal law of the divine government when he said, "I know that it shall be well with them that fear God, but it shall not be well with the wicked, neither will he prolong his days, which are as a shadow,"—and the longer we study the philosophy of Providence, the more are we convinced of the impartiality and rectitude of God's dealings with his creatures.

God's word declares this righteous principle, and the Christian's experience confirms it. "In the time of trouble he shall hide me ; he shall set me upon a rock. Thou shalt hide them in the secret of thy presence from the pride of man ; thou shalt keep them secretly in a pavilion from the strife of tongues. Come, my people, enter into thy chambers and shut thy doors about thee.

Hide thyself, as it were, for a little, until the indignation be overpast." The entire ninety-first Psalm is of similar import, setting forth the immunity of God's children from the more fatal and alarming evils that belong to the present life. We are told by a living historian that during the great fire which nearly destroyed Königsberg, in the year 1764, a Pastor of that city, ninety-three years old lost his church, his house, his valuable library, and all his worldly goods. One of his grandsons rescued him from the flames, carrying him on his shoulders. When asked afterwards by a village pastor, who visited him, to tell to him the result of his long and varied experience, he replied: "I have just been meditating on the 91st Psalm. I have experienced that every statement it contains is true; every promise sure. I lived in times of pestilence, I dwelt in the secret place of the Most High, and abode under the shadow of the Almighty. I have lived in times of war and bloodshed, he covered me with his feathers, his faithfulness was my shield and buckler. I was in danger by fire, he gave his angels charge over me, to bear me up in their hands. He has honoured me and satisfied me with long life. There remains now only one promise unfulfilled, and for this I am now waiting: 'I will show him my salvation.'"

Believers thus "hidden" are the recipients of special blessings. God's own hand supplies them with every needed comfort, more mysteriously at times than the ravens provided for the Prophet's wants. They have drink to drink, of which other men know nothing. They eat hidden manna. They possess a name which no man knoweth save he that receiveth it. They enjoy a peace of mind amid all their outward trials. They glory in tribula-

tion. Dying they live ; chastised, they are always rejoicing ; poor, they make many rich ; having nothing, they possess all things.

If we are of the number of God's hidden ones, the fact cannot long remain hidden from ourselves. The secret of life is inexplicable, but the manifestations of life are patent to the eye. The spiritual life of the believer is unseen—hidden with Christ in God, but the evidence of its existence may be seen. If the heart and lungs play their part, there will always be found more or less activity in the features of the countenance and the movements of the body. So, if we are children of God, our feelings, aims and aspirations will all be towards the unseen. We shall daily long for the appearance of the Saviour, whose arms now encircle us, and whose presence will be the full fruition of our joy.

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LOVING KINDNESS REMEMBERED.

"I have not concealed thy loving kindness from the great congregation."

"We have thought of thy loving kindness, O God, in the midst of thy temple."—Psalms xl, verse 10, and xlviii, verse 10.

"I will mention the loving kindness of the Lord."—Isaiah lxiii, verse 7.

It is a noble sentiment—if sentiment it can be called—to reverence and love the house of God, viewed simply as a human structure. True piety in every age has held in highest esteem the meeting place of God and his saints. Its very dust and stones are precious—hallowed and sanctified by innumerable associations. This feeling was pre-eminent in the Jew. He was never tired of magnifying its grandeur and singing of its beauty. Such a Psalm is the forty-eighth. The very names given to the temple and its surroundings indicate the strong and tender emotions of his heart. It is the "City of God,"—the "Mountain of his Holiness,"—the "City of the Great King." The magnificence of its palaces and the grandeur of its architecture made it at once the joy of the whole earth, and a terror to kings and princes of other lands. They marvelled, they were troubled, they hastened away; and, therefore, in view of all this, the pious Jew is stimulated to the

expression of an honest pride as he gazes upon the temple. "Walk about Zion, and go round about her; tell the towers thereof. Mark ye well her bulwarks, consider her palaces."

But the temple had other attractions for the pious Jews beyond its mere outward beauty. God was there known for a refuge. Here his judgments were made known, his presence manifested, and his favor vouchsafed. Here his worshipping people from time to time enjoyed most wonderful tokens of his condescension and regard, and therefore, says the Psalmist, "We have thought of thy loving kindness, O God, in the midst of thy temple."

The language indicates that thinking of God's loving kindness in his temple was not a solitary act of worship, observed on special occasions when signal deliverances were experienced, but rather the habitual exercise of the grateful Jew. "*We have thought,*"—" *We have not concealed;*" as if the occasions had been so numerous, that praise and thanksgiving were identified with the very building. When the Psalm was composed there may have been some peculiar circumstances that led to the use of the language of the text, such as Jehosaphat's victory over the Arabian nations, more minutely recorded in the second Book of Chronicles, where we read, "they returned every man of Judah and Jerusalem, and Jehosaphat in fore-front of them, to go again to Jerusalem; for the Lord had made them to rejoice over their enemies." But the gratitude of the congregation of Israel was by no means confined to such extraordinary manifestations of Jehovah's power. The loving kindness of God in times of peace, as well as in times of war,—in the daily continuation of mercies, as well as the restoration of comforts long with-

held, was well worthy of the profoundest thought and suggestive of the noblest lessons. Such loving kindness was amazing—far beyond expectation or desert—free and unmerited—constant and considerate. The more it was studied and contemplated, the more did it call forth intelligent praise. And what place more fitting than the temple to think of God's loving kindness, whether exercised in providence or grace; whether bestowed upon the individual Jew or upon the entire congregation of Israel? Surely the place where the King gives audience to his subjects and hears their petitions, is the most suitable spot to offer the language of thanksgiving and recount past mercies. No act of worship is complete without mention of God's loving kindness, and the heart that fails within God's temple to recognize this attribute of the Divine Being, must be void of all devotion. The very building, not to speak of the grand spiritual truths it symbolizes and the blessed opportunities it affords for communion with God, is a standing witness to his goodness. Here we have a sanctuary and a refuge from the cares and trials of life and the endless conflict of existence; emblem and foretaste of a more perfect state, where the weary and the heavy laden shall enjoy unbroken rest.

The loving kindness of God is a higher attribute than his goodness, so often spoken of in Scripture. It is rather the summation or union of all the more tender and ardent emotions that inhere in the Divine Being,—reserved for the favored few, and not dispensed to all the creatures of his hand. The circumstances in which the expression is almost invariably used seem to prove this. Take a few quotations from this same Book of Psalms: "Shew thy marvellous loving kindness, O thou that savest

by thy right hand, *them that put their trust in thee.*" "O continue thy loving kindness unto *them that know thee.*" "Yet the Lord will command his loving kindness in the day time, and in the night his song shall be with me." "Thy loving kindness is *better than life*, therefore my lips shall praise thee." Hear me, O Lord, for thy loving kindness is good; turn unto me according to the multitude of thy tender mercies." In the later prophecies also such language occurs: "I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore with loving kindness have I drawn thee." "I will betroth thee unto me for ever; yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness and in judgment and in loving kindness and in mercies." These and numerous other passages indicate clearly the meaning of the word, and distinguish it from the more common acts of benevolence which all God's creatures enjoy. "The Lord is good," every man can say, and is bound to say, unless he is an open and avowed infidel or atheist. Nothing is more common upon the lips of men, who make no profession whatever of piety. Natural religion of itself will teach a man the greatness as well as the wisdom of God. Once admit the existence of a God and immediately there follows the attribute of goodness, proclaimed by ten thousand voices in nature, echoed in every hill and valley, painted in the rainbow and sparkling in every star. Mysteries there are at every step and secrets that baffle the frail finite intellect of man, but beyond and above all these, the utterance of universal nature is God's goodness, controlling and directing every movement for the happiness and well-being of the creature.

"On Alpine heights the love of God is shed;
He paints the morning red,
The flowerets white and blue,
And feeds them with his dew.
On Alpine heights a loving Father dwells.

"On Alpine heights in troops, all white as snow,
The sheep and wild goats go ;
There, in the solitude
He fills their hearts with food.
On Alpine heights a loving Father dwells.

"Each grassy blade that thick embattled stands
From sea to sea, and daisies infinite
Uplift in praise their little glowing hands,
O'er every hill that under Heaven expands."

But we want as fallen, sinful and helpless creatures, something more than simple goodness, and it is possible, through the grace of God, to experience a higher attribute. If our existence was limited to the present, the goodness of God might suffice. If we had no guilt to answer for, no redemption to seek and no hell to shun, it were enough that we share in that general providence that superintends and upholds the universe. If we held no other relationship to God than the animal creation, and had no hope of immortality beyond the present, God's goodness would fully meet our case. But our position is very different. We groan beneath the load of sin, we tremble at the thought of a holy and righteous judge. We gather no comfort whatever from the revelations and manifestations of nature. We want something that shall assure us not only of the present supply of all our wants, but that provision has been made for the higher demands of the soul, when unclothed and unfettered by the body it stands before its judge. In a word we want mercy as well as goodness ; to be able to say in the language of this forty-eighth Psalm, "This God is our God for ever and ever ; he will guide us even unto death."

Now this want of every rational being is met in the loving kindness of the Lord ; an attribute of God that science and philosophy have never discovered in their pro-

foundest searchings, which reason apart from Scripture never can understand, although *when revealed*, it may approve and faintly grasp. This loving kindness of God, takes cognizance of every want of our higher nature, and follows us from the first beginnings of grace on to the consummations of glory. It provides for the pardon of sin, for the sanctifying of the whole man, and the final entrance of the perfected saint into the heavenly world; while here, it gives firm assurance that what has been pledged and provided will certainly be realized.

To this loving kindness of the Lord, my Christian hearer, you are indebted for all *the mercies in Providence* that have marked your existence up to the present moment. Far better than any one else, you can sum up these temporal favors, and see in one and all the plain hand-writing and foot prints of Jehovah's presence. In health and in sickness, in joy and in sorrow, in prosperity and adversity, in riches and in poverty, at home and abroad, by sea and by land, by night and by day, when surrounded by kindred and when forsaken by friends, in the midst of household treasures and when bereaved and desolate, in sunshine and in shade, the loving kindness of the Lord has been a never-failing fountain of consolation. Looking back upon your life, you cannot fail to observe the wisdom of all your appointments; the perfect adaptation of means to ends, and the wonderful results attained;—the mercy that has been mingled with every judgment, the gracious provisions and supports that have accompanied every trial and the blessed effects that have remained behind the chastisement. In view of all this you need no argument to confirm your faith in a special providence; you are fully assured that the same hand that sustains the universe, that hangs the stars

in the heavens and controls the winds and waves of ocean, is almighty to provide for the humblest of his children, and actually does so from the cradle to the grave. Believing such a truth, and having experienced so much of God's loving kindness in the common affairs of life, it surely becomes you, in the words of the text, to think of it in his holy temple. marking all the way by which you have been led and giving grateful thanks for all you have received. Only thus can you count upon a continuance of heaven's favor, and only thus can your future be as prosperous as the past.

To the loving kindness of the Lord you are indebted for all *the mercies in grace* that you have enjoyed for so many years. Who gave you birth and training in a Christian land, when millions of your fellow creatures are sunk in barbarism and superstition? Who brought you to a knowledge of the truth, when others have been left to perish? Who led you to make public profession of the name of Christ and honor him at his house and table? Nay to go back of all this, what but the free, sovereign grace and mercy of God, singled out this world, to be the theatre of redemption and the scene of Christ's incarnation and death! These and such like questions find their only answer in the loving kindness of the Lord. Why we should have been the recipients of such mighty manifestations of his grace, while others have been left in darkness; why we should have been included and they excluded; why we should have been taught and permitted to raise our voices and hearts to the throne of heaven, while they possess no other religion but the grossest idolatry and the most appalling superstition, are questions which finite man can

never answer in his present state of being. It does not lessen our obligations—nay, it should rather increase our gratitude, that we have been so mysteriously cared for, though we should never understand the method of God's dealings. And if to the knowledge of redemption and the saving and sanctifying influences of the Spirit, which I trust many of us have already tasted, we add the communications of his grace, bestowed upon us through a long period of years, we cannot but have our gratitude and love anew stimulated to the work of praise. Have you been kept from falling? Have you been restored from backsliding? Have you made any attainments in holiness, in faith, in love, and hope? Have you sensibly felt growing desires and yearning aspirations after heaven and heavenly things? Have you been honoured to see others of your friends brought to the Saviour? Have you been made instrumental in rescuing perishing souls? If you have experienced one or all of these, it is due to God's mercy, and it becomes you to "to think of his loving kindness in his temple."

To the loving kindness of God, you are indebted for *special seasons of grace and revelations of his glory*. These are promised to the household of faith more or less frequently, and it is the privilege of saints to seek to enjoy them. The congregation of Israel frequently came together to make grateful mention of God's dealing with them, and such occasions should be as frequent in modern times. Prayer meetings are special seasons of grace, although too seldom thought so by the people of God; services preparatory to the communion, and the delightful scenes and associations of the sacramental table, are of the same character. These are wisely intermingled with the ordinary routine of

religious duties, to stimulate flagging energies and intensify the vision of faith. "Quiet resting places," "Wells of salvation," and green spots in the wilderness, they are to many souls. Surely it becomes many here, in view of past services, to say, "We will think of thy loving kindness, O God, in the midst of thy temple;" "we will remember thy love more than wine. He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love." "I went down into the garden of nuts to see the fruits of the valley, and to see whether the vine flourished and the pomegranates budded. Or ever I was aware, my soul made me like the chariots of Amminadib." If, Brethren, you have no cause to remember the loving kindness of the Lord, your case is deplorable. If you have experienced no joy—no exaltation—no visions of the future;—if you have tasted nothing of Christ's love and power and sympathy;—if you have not been attracted heavenward more powerfully than at any other period of your earthly history—the sacramental table has not served the end for which it was intended. But if in any case—and I trust there are many—faith has brought heaven near, and the rainbow of hope has spanned the gloomy grave; if you have felt in any measure as Paul did when he was taken up to the spirit world, and as John did when beholding the saints in glory, he was commissioned to write, "Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb;" then, my hearers, you will spontaneously make mention of the loving kindness of the Lord.

The mercies enjoyed at a communion season are of a varied character, according to the wants of the child of God.* The mourner has doubtless been cheered—the doubting

* After a sacramental season.

confirmed—the backslider restored—the aged comforted, and the young encouraged. All of us have enjoyed far beyond our deserts. Our blood might have been mingled with our sacrifices, and the dead bodies of hundreds laid lifeless before the altar, had God visited us in vengeance and taken recompense for past iniquities. Instead of this, we are gathered into his temple “to offer the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and call upon the name of the Lord.” “The Lord hath done great things for us, whereof we are glad.” “The Lord hath been mindful of us.” “Return unto thy rest, O my soul, for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee.”

“Awake, my soul, in joyful lays,
And sing thy great Redeemer’s praise;
He justly claims a song from thee,
His loving kindness, O how free!

“He saw me ruined by the fall,
Yet loved me, notwithstanding all;
He saved me from my lost estate,
His loving kindness, O how great!”

If, brethren, you feel grateful to God for the goodness of his house, your entire life will be one long continued hymn of praise. You cannot possibly restrain yourselves. You will feel constrained to burst forth in a glad chorus of thanksgiving. There are many, I am well aware, who cannot express to their fellow-men the deep feelings of their heart; but in the house of God the humblest and most timorous disciple can think and speak of the loving kindness of his heavenly Father. Why should it be otherwise? It is the dictate of instinct for the dumb animal to lap the hand that feeds it. It is the gushing forth of that same affection that makes the birds in tree and forest sing for joy, when the wise Creator garnishes the heavens with beauty and clothes the fields in summer glory! and if

Christian thankfulness be sincere, it will be stamped on every action of the life. The whole man will glow and tremble under the influence of this new emotion. The eye will beam with a brighter intelligence than formerly ; the tongue will discourse more sweetly and persuasively ; and the feet run more eagerly in the way of God's commandments. Bye and bye, the Christian who was abashed in the presence of the dearest friends, when called upon to say a word for the Saviour, will become outspoken and courageous in the presence of foes. He will not rest contented with an inward experience of God's love, but he will witness to God's loving kindness in the crowded thoroughfares and in the busy haunts of commerce, though laughed at by worldlings and scoffed at by skeptics. There is nothing impossible to the man who has tasted of the love of God and hidden himself in the pavilion of Jehovah. He comes forth clad in triple armor, saying, "My mouth shall show forth thy salvation and thy righteousness all the day. I will go in the strength of the Lord ; I will make mention of thy righteousness, even of thine only."

This declaration of the loving kindness of the Lord is necessary to spiritual existence. Singing God's praise and telling of his wondrous acts, are the very essentials of progressive holiness. The child of God is to be not only a receiver but a disburser of blessings. The blood must flow from, as well as to the heart, or existence ends. The tree must put forth leaves and flowers and branches, as well as draw nourishment from the earth. The clouds of heaven must give forth rain to soften the parched earth and irrigate the valleys, as well as draw up the waters of the ocean into their bosom. And so Christians must not only feel the loving kindness of the Lord, but think of it and speak

of it to others. Thought is good, but action is better. Meditation and study of God's character and dealings is profitable for our own spiritual advancement—practical development of inward piety is better for the world. The one is the complement of the other—they cannot be disjoined even for the shortest period.

And now you have gone back to your homes and the cares of the world. What are to be the results of this communion season? Do not allow such occasions to pass away, without resolving in the strength of God to achieve something worthy of your Christian calling. Aim high. Seek great things for the Master. Lift aloft the gospel standard in your families and workshops; and inscribe upon it: "The Lord is my keeper." We are individually in our own persons, and in the converts we make, writing the history of eternity! Are we in the future state to have no blessed retrospect of work done for Christ? Are we to pass on to our inheritance with no single soul as a trophy of redeeming grace? Are we to have no star in our crown, and to add no gem to the coronet of our Immanuel? Surely there is holy ambition in the heart of every saint to make his own heaven all the happier, and its praises all the more jubilant, by adding to the number of the redeemed. Sing and work, then,—work and sing—

"I will sing for Jesus,
With his blood he bought me,
And all along my pilgrim way,
His loving hand has brought me.

"I will sing for Jesus,
His name alone prevailing,
Shall be my sweetest music,
When heart and flesh are failing."

"O! help me sing for Jesus,
Help me tell the story
Of him who did redeem us,
The Lord of life and glory."

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THE ANCHOR WITHIN THE VEIL.

“An anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil.”—Hebrews 6, v. 19.

It is hope that is spoken of as the anchor within the veil. The hope of immortality through a risen Saviour, with all the accompanying blessings which redemption secures to the believer beyond the present. It is described as an anchor of the soul, sure and steadfast, and “entering into that which is within the veil.” The idea presented is, that the soul, like a ship exposed to storm and tempest, and ever liable to drift away and founder upon hidden rocks, must ever rest upon the promises of God’s word, as its only ground of confidence and security. While the anchor holds, the ship is safe, and so long as the soul grasps firmly the hopes of heaven, its peace is certain. The anchor may reach far down in the depths of ocean, beyond the limits of human vision, but the deeper it lies, the firmer will be its hold. So although the anchor of our hope reaches into the silent depths of the spirit world, and takes hold of God’s eternal throne,—when grasped by faith, it keeps the soul calm and composed amid all the fury and agitation of life.

When a ship is sailing (says a living preacher) the

anchor is of no use ; but when the ship would lie still, it is the anchor that holds it. It is not alone a storm that requires the great offices of an anchor. In the calmness of a harbor a ship requires it. In the fairest weather, when winds are as gentle as if a dove's wings had produced them, a ship will still drift. The silent current, the soft palms of the tiniest ripples that splash against the sides gradually push her along ; and she will ground upon the flats, or strike upon the shore, or grate upon the harsh ledges. And so the soul is like a ship. As long as it is moving with strong impulsion, it holds its course easily. When earnest impulses cease, then unless something holds the soul steadfast, it drifts, and drifting is far more dangerous to a soul than to a ship. It drifts into doubt, and out of doubt comes morbid impulses ; and out of morbid impulses come reactions of the most dangerous kinds. When a ship is on the sand, cracking in the sun ; gaping at every seam, useless, pitiable, unable to keep itself or be helped—that is the soul drifting and gone up on the arid sands of unbelief.

This anchor of the soul—the Christian's hope—is a frequent subject of remark in the Apostolic writings, and a great variety of terms are used to indicate and illustrate its nature and vocation. It is a "good hope," "a lively or living hope," and "a hope which maketh not ashamed." Taking all these terms together, we have but a faint conception of the fullness and richness of the Christian hope, which far transcends the power of language to express, even when uttered by the tongue of inspiration.

This hope is directly founded upon the resurrection of Christ. If Christ is not risen, preaching is vain, and so is faith in a preached Gospel, for the great end of preaching is to fix men's thoughts upon higher realities than things

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of the present world. If Christ is not risen, the Apostles are false witnesses, because they testified that Christ had been raised from the dead, and that with their own eyes they had seen him in the flesh. If Christ is not risen, the dead in Christ are lost. There is no resurrection, apart from His resurrection. Those of our friends who have fallen asleep in Jesus have perished,—the hope of a reunion with them in heaven, however pleasing as a dream of the imagination, can never be realized; and finally, if the future is thus a mere shadow, and if in this life only we have hope, we are of all men most miserable. Better far never to have entertained the hope of eternal blessings, than to have that hope blasted at the hour of death. But it is not so. Our hope of immortality is good. Christ has risen—He has become the first fruit of them that sleep. In Him all yet shall be made alive—and thus we can cry out exultingly, “O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?”—while we daily look for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.

The question for every hearer then is, what is my hope, and what is the ground of my hope? Every man has some kind of hope. The hopes of many are false and deceptive, still for the time being they lift the soul above despair. The exercise of hope is essential to the happiness of our nature. It belongs to no one stage of existence, but is felt more or less in every rank and condition. It gilds the dawn of childhood—it spans the horizon of manhood—it tinges the sunset of life. There is no happiness which hope does not promise, no difficulty which it cannot surmount, and no common grief which it does not mitigate. Poet after poet have sung of the pleasures of hope, nor can

its blessed influences be over-estimated. But unless one have a better hope than the mere expectation of happiness in the present life, he is destitute of what alone can give comfort and consolation in a dying hour. When the things of time and sense grow dim and indistinct to the vision, and created objects cease to interest, we need something that shall support and sustain us in the passage towards the eternal world.

Now, this is the character of the Christian's hope, as contrasted with that of the worldling. It has a good foundation. It rests upon the eternal promises—promises made before the foundation of the world and in the counsels of eternity; not on mere calculations or baseless data, but on the word and work of God's own son. If included in the covenant of life, we are safe. God's promise is confirmed by His death, and seeing it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge to the hope set before us, have strong consolation. Christ's work is satisfactory, and in every sense complete. It has been accepted by the Father. His righteousness has infinite merit, and arrayed in this righteousness we have nothing to fear. Such a hope every believer has a right to cherish. The Holy Spirit testifies to his conscience that he has been reconciled to God. His own consciousness from day to day agrees with the testimony of the Spirit, while increasing foretastes of the coming glory which he longs for, make assurance perfect. The hope becomes brighter as the dark shadows of the grave come nearer—heaven becomes more intensely real, as earth becomes visionary and viewless.

On the other hand, the hope which multitudes in Christian lands possess, is but a hollow mockery, only serving during the present life to hide the issues of the

future. The hypocrite's hope—the hope of the wicked shall perish. Their hope shall be cut off, and their trust shall be like a spider's web. The hope which rests on things seen and tangible, in gold and silver, in friendships and fame and fortune, cannot outlast the grave. "What is the hope of the hypocrite, though he hath gained, when God taketh away his soul?" What source of comfort remains for him who has spent his life in forgetfulness of God and in open abuse of proffered mercy—who has laughed at providential warnings, and mocked at heaven's entreaties, and only begins to realize his condition amid the tortures of a dying hour? Sad and awful is the prospect of such a soul beyond the grave!

Not only so, but the hope which many nominal and professed Christians boast of is equally unsatisfactory. In some way or other, they imagine that without any effort or desire they shall be saved. The Gospel proclaimed from day to day in their hearing offers solid grounds of hope, but they reject it. If you ask them as to the reason for the hope they entertain, they will answer—the mercy of God. They hope that even for such unworthy creatures pardon will be found in the hour of death, or they rest their hope upon their church baptism, or their church membership, or because of certain spurious experiences felt from time to time in their outwardly religious life. These are not good hopes. Those who rest upon them alone must ultimately perish, as did the unbelieving Jews under the Abrahamic covenant.

This good hope, which, as an anchor of the soul, enters within the veil, all Christians should seek to possess in the highest degree. What is called in Scripture "full assurance of hope," very many of God's people never reach.

The result is occasional sadness and sorrow—periodical seasons of doubt and fear—hesitancy as to their calling and election, and the absence of that joyous and happy experience which should characterize the child of God. Nay, some good people seem to think it presumption to testify to their possession of this hope, although the Apostle distinctly commands us “to be ready to give an answer to every man that asketh of the hope that is in us.” Much of this undesirable state of mind arises from unduly dwelling upon our state of guilt by nature, to the almost utter exclusion of the love of God in Christ Jesus. It is not good for any man to be always mourning over his coldness in spiritual things, his shortcomings and failures in the performance of duty. A man who shuts himself up in a dark cellar, where scarcely a sunbeam enters, will in process of time entirely destroy his power of vision, and become altogether unable to gaze upon the light of day. So if a child of God gropes day after day in the darkness of despair, as he broods over his naturally guilty and undone condition, he will by and by be unable to look towards the Sun of Righteousness, or take any comfort in the promises of God’s Word. Doubts are the result of weak faith; and weak faith comes of withdrawing the eye from the Cross of Calvary. The whole matter resolves itself into a question of confidence in God’s veracity. Eternal life is promised to every believer; nay, it is represented as a present possession. He that believes in Christ is assured of pardon, of acceptance, of complete sanctification. Do you believe that such is God’s testimony, and do you regard it as worthy of credence? If, then, such promises are contained in Scripture, is it not criminal to doubt, is it not tantamount to a denial of Christ’s death, nay, of its reality? True faith never reasons nor speculates. Once

assured that God has spoken, it gives no place to human wisdom. Its language is "let God be true and every man a liar."

When the promises are thus grasped, hope becomes radiant, constant, increasing. The man who has this hope goes through the world triumphantly joyful, and exultant. His faith is upward and onward, in spite of many and severe obstacles. The grace of hope is an helmet to the Christian soldier. As in ancient times the soldier with the helmet upon his head, entered fearlessly the thickest of the fight, and defied the arrows of the enemy, so the child of God, in possession of this hope, becomes courageous and lion-hearted in the conflict of life. It makes him superior to troubles and annoyances which unsettle and agitate weaker minds, and supplies him with motives and incitements to further effort. Nor does this hope cease to operate when death is near. It is then only that its real value is understood. Standing by the death-bed of God's saints, we have often witnessed the unspeakable comfort it affords. Unlike that false hope which is nervously clutched in the hours of despair, to allay in some measure the pangs of wretchedness and misery that confront the dying sinner, this hope becomes stronger and clearer as the last enemy draws near, to emancipate the soul from sin and introduce it to unmingled and eternal bliss.

This hope gives strength to bear and wait. Patience worketh experience and experience hope, but it is also true that hope produces patience. When we know that the day of our final redemption draws nigh, it is easy to submit to present privations. When we have in prospect the morning of joy, the night of weeping seems short. When land is in sight, although the vessel should stagger somewhat

by the channel swell, we feel no alarm. We may groan, being burdened, and at the same time rejoice in expectation of coming rest. We feel like fainting by the way ere we reach the heights of Zion, but the assurance that we are near the Holy City, and soon shall stand within its gates, nerves us to renewed perseverance. It cannot be long till the warfare is over, and the recompense bestowed.

This hope purifies the heart and life. The hope includes seeing Christ and becoming like Christ. A wonderful change takes place when we stand before our Father's throne, a change that now can be but faintly conceived. But however inadequately and imperfectly understood, its reality is beyond all doubt. The knowledge of such a change stimulates the believer to a gradual approach towards the character of his Saviour. No other religion but that of the Bible teaches the absolute necessity of purity of heart in order to seeing God. False religions engender evil passions, but Christ formed in the believer the hope of glory, exalts and purifies the whole man. It cannot be otherwise. Those who hope for heavenly associates, will prepare for such companionship—will endeavor to reach the highest point of holiness possible in this sinful world, and conform themselves to the demand of the state that lies before them.

In order to keep alive this hope, constant meditation upon the glory of the heavenly state is requisite. We must think much of the state beyond, to bear us up through the present. The study of God's word, and a review of his faithfulness, is also highly beneficial; and last, but most important of all, living near to Christ and reposing in Him, gives a reality to this hope, which nothing else can impart.

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In view of all this, need we wonder that the Apostle should call this hope a *blessed hope*, and that believers should be represented as "*looking for* that blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ." It is not the hope merely of being saved, but of seeing Christ, based upon a present assurance of salvation. To see Christ is the culmination of the believer's joy, and the consummation of his hopes. It is entire freedom from sin, sanctified immortality, and *perfect knowledge*. On earth it is but little that the most advanced saint can know of God. Every new step but reveals his ignorance. One difficulty overcome, another is suggested. But then, there are no shadows. The light of heaven resolves all mysteries, and makes plain all perplexing problems. It is *uninterrupted fellowship*. Absent from the body, the believer is present with the Lord; and to be with Christ is far better. Before the throne they serve him day and night. There is a love that grows weary of its object, but pure love never. It desires above all else the society of the loved one. "Whom having not seen we love," is the language of the saint on earth; but what must be the fervor and intensity of this passion, when Christ is revealed to his astonished gaze? Says the Apostle, "The Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trump of God, and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall we ever be with the Lord." Says Christ, in his valedictory prayer, "Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory which thou has given me; for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world." Finally, it is *perfect assimilation*.

lation. Body and soul shall be transformed and restored to more than the original purity of paradise. "As for me," says the Psalmist, "I will behold thy face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake with thy likeness." Or, as the Apostle says, "Our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ; who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able to subdue all things unto himself."

Are you, my hearers, looking for this blessed hope? Are you among them that love his appearing? Are you expecting the Master's coming? Such an attitude implies *confidence* in the faithfulness of the promises, for the promises of the gospel are the only grounds of our faith and hope. They are so many bonds or pledges graciously given to assure believers of the security of their salvation, and the certainty of their eternal welfare. *It implies desire and expectation*, and thus the Psalmist says: "I wait for the Lord, my soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope. My soul *waiteth* for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning; I *say more than they that watch for the morning*." As the watchman looks out for the grey streaks of morning after a dark and dismal night; as when at sea the sailor on the mast head, or on the deck, looks ahead through the darkness and the storm to descry some friendly sail, or sound the alarm of coming danger; as the sentinel, walking backwards and forwards, looks eagerly for the morning light to break in the distant east and relieve him from his lonely toil; as the weary watcher by the sick-bed counts the hours and minutes as they pass, marking from the window of the death chamber, star after star rising

above the horizon, until at last the morning star appears,—so is the believer represented as watching for the coming of his Lord. The story is told of a poor peasant on the Welsh mountains, who, month after month, year after year, through a long period of declining life, used every morning, as soon as he awoke, to open his casement window, towards the east, and look out to see if Jesus Christ was coming. He was no calculator, as the writer well remarks, or he need not have looked so long; he was no student of prophecy, or he need not have looked at all; he was ready, or he would not have been in so much haste; he was willing, or he would rather have looked another way; he loved, or it would not have been the first thought of the morning. His Master did not come, but a messenger did, to fetch the ready one home. And so, “often when in the morning the child of God awakes, weary and encumbered with the flesh, perhaps from troubled dreams, perhaps with troubled thoughts, his Father’s secret comes presently across him; he looks up, if not out, to feel, if not to see, the glories of that last morning, when the trumpet shall sound and the dead shall arise indestructible; no weary limbs to bear the spirit down; no feverish dreams to haunt the vision; no dark forecasting of the day’s events, or returning memory of the griefs of yesterday.”

“Blessed are those servants, whom the Lord when he cometh shall find watching,” and who are able to say, “Now, Lord, what wait I for? my hope is in thee.” There is nothing in the world worth waiting for but this. The brightest anticipations of youth vanish before they are realized—the golden dreams of ambition are shadowy and unsubstantial;—God alone is the enduring portion of the soul. Blessed posture! to be waiting for the coming of

the Lord ! I read lately of a desolate woman, who had her home among the tombs. Near the wall of a lonely churchyard, she sat day after day, as motionless as the stone upon which she sat. Wild and neglected locks of grey hair fell down over her shoulders, while the winds of heaven played with her torn and tattered garments. And wherefore sat she there ? Because she could not be elsewhere. Her heart was with the graves of her children. Sorrow for these children had made the light of her eye grow dim. She marked not when the autumn leaves fell around her ; she knew not when the spring breezes melted the snow upon the tombs. During long years, she had seen graves opening all around her, but she still sat in the midst of death and waited ! Like her, there may be some here, who, having laid dear ones in the grave, are now *only waiting*. But it is not with such melancholy feelings. They wait in the hope of a blessed resurrection, when death-divided friends shall be eternally re-united.

On the coast of the Adriatic, the wives of the fishermen come down by the sea shore after sunset, and sing a melody. After singing the first stanza, they listen a while for an answering strain from afar off upon the water, and alternately sing and listen, until the well-known voices of their beloved ones are heard telling them that they are almost home. So it is with us to-day. We live in the evening of the world's history, and can almost hear the voice of our beloved, as he comes to call his waiting people home. "He which testifieth these things, saith, surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so come, Lord Jesus."

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"HOW LONG HAVE I TO LIVE?"

"And the King said unto Barzillai, Come thou over with me, and I will feed thee with me in Jerusalem. And Barzillai said unto the King, How long have I to live that I should go up with thee to Jerusalem? I am this day fourscore years old; and can I discern between good and evil? Can thy servant taste what I eat or what I drink? Can I hear any more the voice of singing men and singing women? Wherefore then should thy servant be yet a burden unto my Lord the King?"—2nd Samuel xx, v. 38-35.

With the death of Absalom, the rebellion against his father ended, and immediately preparations were entered upon to recall the rightful Sovereign to his throne and capital at Jerusalem. It had been a most unnatural war—a revolt altogether unparalleled in the history of the world. Glad as King David doubtless was to regain his supremacy, he would doubly have rejoiced, had his foolish son Absalom been spared to repent of his sins, and seek forgiveness for his crimes. On his way back to Jerusalem many old and valued friends of the King gathered round him, to bid him welcome and offer sympathy. Among these are mentioned Shimei, the Benjamite, Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan, for whom David had long entertained a strong

affection, and last, but not least, good old Barzillai the Gileadite, who came from Rogelim to conduct the King over Jordan, and bestow upon him a parting benediction. Very little is said in the word of God concerning Barzillai, but the little that we gather, impresses us with a high opinion both of his piety and his patriotism. He is honorably mentioned as one of those who brought provision to King David and his court, when as fugitives from the rebel leaders they sought protection in the land of Gilead. When David is about to yield up the kingdom to Solomon, he gives him express command to show kindness to the sons of Barzillai the Gileadite, and to let them eat at the royal table, "for so they came to me when I fled because of Absalom thy brother." Having heard that the conspiracy and insurrection were ended, and that David had started on his way back to Jerusalem, Barzillai—old and infirm though he was—could not refrain from showing his patriotism and his piety. Nor had the King forgotten the kindness of his aged servant, in days when friends were few and faint-hearted. He well knew how opportune were his supplies of food when driven in haste from his palace; and that when his followers were "hungry and weary and thirsty in the wilderness, Barzillai brought wheat and barley, and corn and honey, and butter and sheep, for David and his people to eat." In return for such disinterested loyalty, the King makes offer of a residence in the palace of Jerusalem for the remainder of his life. "Come thou over with me and I will feed thee with me in Jerusalem." It was a tempting offer, honorable alike to him who so generously extended it, and to him who so worthily deserved it. But it possessed no attractions for the worthy patriarch, and therefore, with a heart overflowing with gratitude to the King—with the simplicity of a child—the self-denial of a patriot, and the

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piety of a saint, he answers, "*How long have I to live, that I should go up with the King unto Jerusalem?* I am this day fourscore years old, and can I discern between good and evil? Can thy servant taste what I eat or drink? Can I hear any more the voice of singing men and singing women? Wherefore then should thy servant be yet a burden unto my lord the King? Thy servant shall go a little way over Jordan with the King. And why should the King recompense me with such a reward? Let thy servant, I pray thee, turn back again, that I may die in mine own city and be buried in the grave of my father and of my mother!"

The time was when Barzillai would have paused before refusing such a generous offer, nay, when he would in all likelihood have grasped the honor of being a courtier in the palace—a friend of the monarch, and a guest at his table. But those days were now gone, and gone forever. The infirmities of old age were upon him, rendering him less covetous of worldly enjoyments and carnal pleasures. The keepers of the house were trembling, and the strong men bowing themselves. Those that look out at the windows were darkened, and could no longer enjoy the beauty of the landscape, or the glory of a palace. The doors were shut in the streets—his ears could no longer carry to his heart the much-loved music of tabret and harp, for "the daughters of music were brought low." All these were the forerunners of dissolution, when "the silver cord should be loosened, the golden bowl broken, the pitcher broken at the fountain, and the wheel broken at the cistern." How foolish, thought Barzillai, for me do go up to Jerusalem and be introduced to the festivities and gaieties of a palace! My presence there would spread a gloom on

everything around, and dim the new-created glory of the returning and victorious King! No! let me rather turn back again to my native city, quiet and unknown though it be, and there in solitude and peacefulness breathe the last hours of life, and be buried in the grave of my father and my mother." And so we read, "all the people went over Jordan, and when the King was crossed over, he kissed Barzillai and blessed him, and he returned unto his own place."

Look at the reasons which prevented Barzillai from accepting the offer of the King.

In the estimate of the good old man *the enjoyments and luxuries of palace life* were altogether *unsuited for his time of existence*. He was by no means what men of the world usually call a gloomy, morose and melancholy Christian, who—disappointed and chagrined in former years by misfortune and reverses in his condition, endeavored to cast a shade of depression and sadness upon the innocent enjoyments of life. Nor was it with reluctance he declined the office and honors of a courtier. But he wisely judged there were other positions and duties far more befitting him in his declining years than to be the attendant of a King. It is indeed one of the most pitiable sights to see an old grey-haired man, decrepid and feeble, furrowed and tottering, with one foot in the grave and the other on its verge, hugging to his breast the pleasures of younger years, unwilling to relinquish them—or admit that he has advanced to the autumn days of life; endeavoring by artificial aid to bring back the bloom of manhood to his frame; to kindle anew the fires of youth, and prop up the pillows of the decaying tabernacle by indulgence in frivolities and pastimes degrading to manhood in any circumstances, far less when

near the end of existence. There are, it is true, a few persons to be found who, having arrived at an age beyond the average time of life, still possess not only the intellectual vigor and mental grasp, but also the emotions, and feelings, and mirthfulness of younger years. But these are very few indeed. We expect to find in old age a sober cheerfulness, a wisdom and a prudence that only comes after long experience of the world; a deportment and demeanor alike free from fretfulness and flippancy, which indicates maturity of judgment and saintliness of soul. Such a condition Barzillai had now arrived at. He had tasted life and probably enjoyed it to the full, he had calmly and accurately estimated its profits and weighed its advantages in the light of eternity, and would not on any consideration renew the toil or begin the pilgrimage afresh. "I would not live always," were the sentiments of his heart, or as Jacob said when standing before Pharaoh, "the days of the years of my pilgrimage are an hundred and thirty years; few and evil have the days of the years of my life been, and have not attained unto the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their pilgrimage."

No man at any age need covet the honors of a palace. Kings must have their courtiers and attendants, and Queens their maids in waiting, but those who hold such positions frequently imperil their highest interests. It is true that it is the character of the Sovereign that gives tone and dignity to the throne and palace, but even under the rule of the most virtuous Kings and Queens a palace is a place of varied temptation, nowhere found in other walks of life. Immoralities of the deepest dye, plots and intrigues of the darkest character, maxims and examples of the most equivocal virtue, have often been the offshoots of palace life.

Barzillai was also possessed of a *manly spirit of independence* that prevented him from accepting the king's generosity. "Wherefore therefore should thy servant be yet a burden unto my Lord the King?" This spirit, it is true, may be carried too far. A man may be too independent and high-spirited for his own good, or the interests of his family. But there is nevertheless much to admire in that spirit of independence which renders a man regardless of the frown or favor of his fellows. King David would not have deemed old Barzillai a burden upon his hospitality, or an intruder in the palace. It would have been his highest delight to honor and reverence the venerable saint, not simply on account of his former patriotism, but for his own intrinsic worth. Yet there was a risk in the matter. "Put not your trust in Princes nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help," is an exhortation the truth of which is experienced in daily life. Amid the excitement, pomp and pageantry of royalty, Barzillai could take no part. His presence would ill-accord with the gay and light-hearted merriment of all around him. Besides all this, human nature is exceedingly variable in its moods. The best of friends become cool, and love often changes to bitter hatred. King David was but a man, subject to like passions as we are—liable to hasty words and inconsiderate actions, calculated to wound and chafe a sensitive nature. The time might come, when old Barzillai, ejected from the palace, would be cast out upon the world to die, with none to alleviate his pains or soothe his sorrows. And should the aged patriarch survive the King, another would possess the throne, totally regardless of his claims to generous treatment. Actions far more unlikely than these possibilities have taken place. The son

has driven the aged father from his own fireside, and the daughter the mother from her home!

But the grand reason why Barzillai refuses to accept the King's offer was his *conscious nearness to eternity*. "How long have I to live that I should go up with the King to Jerusalem?" He realized the fact that his days were few, and he seemed rather pleased than otherwise at the thought. Had he been in the morning of existence, he might have accompanied the King to Jerusalem, and accepted office under his sceptre, but there was scarcely more time left him than to cross the Jordan, and prepare for his end. Death comes suddenly to young and old, but there is a peculiar uncertainty in the case of the aged. When the body is reduced by growing infirmities, and the heart beats languidly, a very little will stop its motion. Mental excitement as much as bodily sickness will hasten the end. Barzillai well knew this, and desired to be alone in the evening of his days. He felt pin after pin of the earthly tabernacle giving way, and he was looking fondly for that house—that building of God—which is eternal in the heavens. He greatly proffered admission to the palace of the great King to the honors of Jerusalem.

It is wise for old age to prepare for death. The best regulated lives and the holiest of men find much to reflect upon in the closing hours of life. When we enjoy full possession of all our faculties, then is the time to survey the past and calmly anticipate the future. The time comes when reason and judgment and memory all fail to act their part, and clouds and darkness shade the mind. The Captain of the Emperor Charles V. spake wisely when he said "There ought to be a pause between the hurry of life and day of death."

For the aged who hear me the question is a fitting one, "How long have I to live?" At the most but a few years. With you it is the sunset of life—the last milestone will soon be reached and the journey ended. You know not the moment you may be called hence. And yet, is it not a lamentable truth that old men and women are frequently the most unconcerned as to the approach of death. Every new lease of life gives hope for another, until they all but believe that they are immortal. The old building has stood so long and braved so many storms that it is deemed proof against destruction. The old ship has survived so many strains—her timbers have often creaked, and yet she has never foundered that the sailor thinks her incapable of shipwreck. So it is with many aged ones. The length of their present life makes them indifferent to the certainty of death and the awful realities of the future state.

For the middle aged who hear me the question is a fitting one, "How long have I to live?" Strength of body is no protection against the King of Terrors. And, therefore, in the press of labor—in beginning new enterprises—in accepting new duties and entering upon new responsibilities—in entangling yourselves more deeply in the business, and embarrassments of the age, it is good occasionally to pause and put the question, "How long have I to live?" The plans and projects upon which your heart is so intensely set, may fall into other hands to carry out to completion when you are silent in the grave. This engrossing concern about the present world, may peril your interests in the future.

For those just entering upon the cares of existence the question is a fitting one, "How long have I to live?"

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Life is all before you, clothed in the most gorgeous and attractive colors. Hopeful, sanguine and light-hearted; ignorant of the evil that is in the world, and having no personal experience of its sorrows, you laugh to scorn the admonitions of Christian teachers, as but the gloomy forebodings of deceased imaginations. Having hardly as yet tasted life's sweets, you think it strange that we should chill your aspirations, or check the efforts of an honorable ambition, by hinting that before you have developed the powers of manhood, the period of active labor may terminate! Young man, we desire for you the fullest enjoyment of existence, that you may more than realize every hope that has dawned upon your mental vision, and possess every good that can gratify the soul. But let not the excitements of the present, keep out of view the inconceivable misery of an unprepared future. By pondering the solemnity of the question, you will live a wiser and die a happier man.

"Oh, what were life
Even in the warm and summer light of joy
Without those hopes, that like refreshing gales
At evening from the sea, come o'er the soul,
Breathed from the ocean of eternity.
And Oh! without them who could bear the storms
That fall in waving blackness o'er the waters
Of agitated life! Then hopes arise
All round our sinking souls, like those fair birds
O'er whose soft plumes the tempest hath no power;
Waving their snow-white wings amid the darkness,
And wiling us with gentle motion on
To some calm island, on whose silvery strand
Dropping at once, they fold their silent pinions,
And as we touch the shores of paradise
In love and beauty walk around our feet."

The past has vanished with its record to the bar of judgment. Golden opportunities and priceless privileges which have been allowed to pass unimproved, have fled on

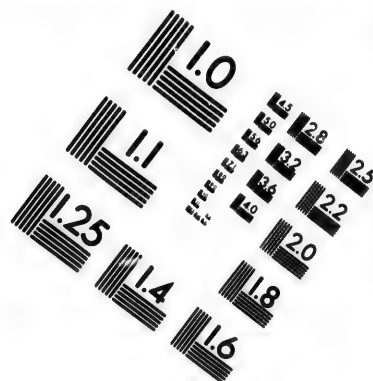
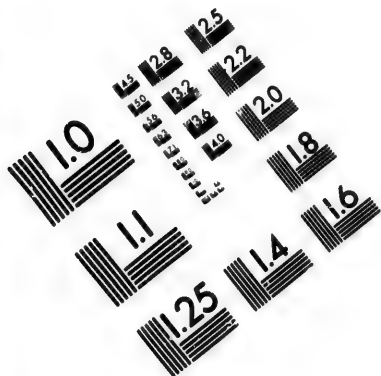
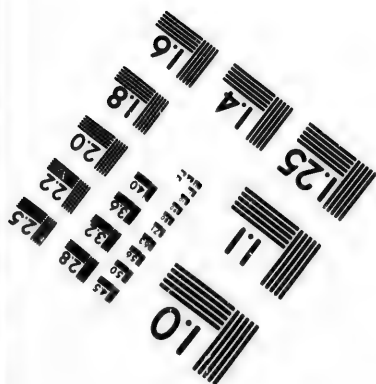
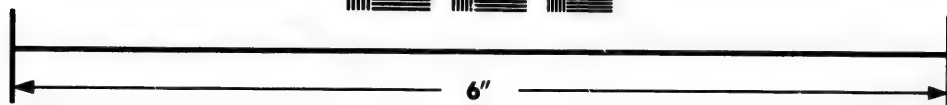
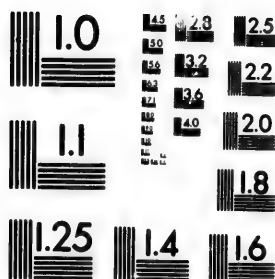


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lightning wings beyond recall. Many who hear me have spent more years on earth than they have now to live. Suppose, my hearer, that you and I could put the question, "How long have I to live?" and receive an answer. Suppose that we were told that before this year, has ended, we should pass away, how should we act? Would we not employ every moment and prize every opportunity afforded us in preparation for eternity? And yet it is all but certain, that some hearer will pass away before the present year is closed! Happy to us to whom the call may be addressed if found willing to bid farewell to earth—gladly resigning existence here, to enter upon a blissful immortality. As in the case of Barzillai, who preferred the retirement and seclusion of his home, to all the honors and attentions of Royalty, so in the evening of life the Christian feels that there is little to detain him here. The world ceases to have the strong attractions it once possessed, and he almost longs for the hour of his release. He finds himself a stranger in a strange land. The friends of his youth, the companions of his boyhood, the rivals of his riper years, the dear ones of his household, one by one depart and leave him stripped of everything that once made existence happy. The aged wanderer described by the poet Wordsworth, in his *Excursion*, speaks truly when he says:

"I see around me here
Things which you cannot see; we die my friend,
Nor we alone, but that which each man loved
And prized in his peculiar nook of earth
Dies with him, or is changed; and very soon
Even of the good is no memorial left."

It is said of Filippo Neri, founder of the congregation of the Priests of the Oratory in Italy, that while at one of the Universities a young man ran up to him with smiling face, and told the Priest that the long cherished wish of

his heart had at length been gratified, for his parents had given him leave to study law. The good man after listening patiently and kindly to the youth replied, "Well, when you have completed your studies, what do you mean to do then?" "Take my doctor's degree" said the youth. "And then?" asked Neri. "Then," said the youth, "I shall by my eloquence, learning, zeal and acuteness, draw notice and gain fame." "And then?" repeated Neri. "Why then," added the youth, "I shall be promoted to high office and shall make money and grow rich." "And then?" continued Neri. "And then," said the young man, "I shall live comfortably and honorably, in health and dignity, and look forward quietly to a happy old age." "And then?" continued Neri again. "And then," answered the young man. "And then—and then—I shall die." "And then?" once more asked Neri, with a deeper emphasis! The young man made no answer. He hung down his head and walked thoughtfully away. He began for the first time to realize that

"'Tis not the whole of life to live
Nor yet of death to die,"

and changing the whole plan of his life gave himself to God's service. May such a result follow in the case of many who now hear me!

SUNSET AT MID-DAY.

"And Moses was an hundred and twenty years old when he died; his eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated."—Deuteronomy 34, v. 7.

There is something unspeakably pleasing in a christian's death bed. The last hours of the saint are often the most glorious in his whole experience. Like the setting sun when at the close of day, it lights up the western sky with a fiery glow of splendor, so it is often with the child of God at the sunset of human life. He appears then to have his countenance irradiated with something of heaven's celestial light. And even where some few remaining doubts and perplexities cluster round his dying pillow, these but lend additional glory to the scene. For just as the down-going orb of day by its effulgent brightness, resolves all the clouds that hover near it into golden-tipped surroundings, so a strong unwavering faith, lifts the soul above their influence, and "the mists and uncertainties of mortality, are all illuminated more or less by the light of a blessed future."

To the former class belongs the death of Moses. Once before he ascended a mountain, but in different circumstances from the present. Then it was Mount Horeb—now it is Mount Pisgah. Then it was “amid clouds and darkness”—now “amid the blaze of oriental day.” Formerly he went up to meet God and live—now to see God and die. Then he went up trembling, although it was to gather immortal glory;—now he goes up calmly, although to encounter the last enemy. His is a conqueror’s death and not a coward’s. He had led a busy life and possessed a wonderful character. He was symmetrical in every grace. Perseverance—disinterestedness; humility, and patriotism were all blended and proportioned. As Historian—Legislator, and Commander he has no human rival. His name is enshrined in all literature—found in all traditions—reverenced by the church on earth—mingles with the songs of heaven. “They sing the song of Moses and the Lamb.”

This chapter contains the account of his last hours on earth. It was the evening of his pilgrimage. The forty years’ journey in the wilderness was now ended and Canaan just at hand. He seemed to be on the very eve of reaping his reward. Nothing but the westward range of mountains lay between him and the promised land. Contrary to his fondly cherished hopes another summons came, than to cross the Jordan. He must ascend Mount Nebo and die. “Like some strong swimmer, who for long hours has striven to gain a beautiful shore, the sight of which as he rose on the billow nerved and cheered him in his struggle, but who is only able to reach a little islet, where he has a clearer view of the desired land, when his strength fails him and the recurring wave sweeps him

away," so is it with Moses. The promised land, with its milk and honey—its grapes of Eschol—its fertile fields and walled cities, are all spread out before him, but he dare not enter. Human nature, we imagine, must at first have shrunk from such a trial—but faith prevails. No murmurs nor vain regrets are mentioned—all his concern is for the people. "Let Jehovah the God of the spirits of all flesh set a man over the congregation, who may go in before them and who may lead them out and bring them in, that the congregation of the Lord be not as sheep that have no shepherd." With Christian fortitude he ascends Mount Nebo, and prepares to die. There on Pisgah's heights he begins to breathe celestial air, and is fanned by spicy gales from a richer land than Caanan, while with the eye of faith he descrys the shining towers and palaces of the new Jerusalem. "So Moses was an hundred and twenty years old when he died; his eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated." From this we learn,

I. That God often calls away his people in the very midst of their labors, and at the very moment when they would most earnestly desire to live. Moses, doubtless, had such feelings. Much yet was needed in behalf of the Israelites. The tribes had to be conducted over Jordan. Many enemies had yet to be conquered, and the land portioned and the Theocracy fully established. The grand object of his life seemed near completion, when just at the very moment of victory, and when he is beginning to think of rest and leisure, he is called away, and another reaps the reward of his labors. So is it now. Men for the most part die full of plans and projects—in the midst of labour, and fully harnessed for grander achievements. Few die with completed plans. The farmer leaves his fields un-

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ploughed, or having sown the seed, another reaps his ground. The artist dies with the unformed figures upon the canvass. The merchant at his desk—the statesman in the senate—the minister in his study.

It seems strange in so many cases that God should call to Himself His most efficient agents in the world before their work seems to be accomplished. "One soweth and another reapeth," is an almost universal law in Christian enterprise. Just at the very moment when success seems to reward previous toil and enjoyment to follow labour, does the active brain cease to plan, the busy hand to execute, and the throbbing heart to beat. God's ways are mysterious, and past finding out. "Help, Lord, for the godly man faileth," we exclaim, while standard-bearer after standard-bearer falls upon the battle-field;—Christian hearts despond, and the hosts of hell press on to what seems certain victory.

We mistake, however, in saying that God's servants are ever taken before their work is finished. *In no case is it so.* We, who only see but a small portion of God's providential designs, think so. The removal of useful, earnest, intelligent men from the church and the world seems to be disastrous, unwise, and fatal to the great interests in which they are engaged; whereas, such an event may be the starting point of new life and vigor to the cause in question. The very name and memory of such men may act as a power upon those who are left behind, inspiring them with new zeal and enthusiasm in the object to which their lives were devoted. Nor must we forget that man's immortal powers have another field for their exercise, than this disjointed, rudimentary state of being. The world is

at best but a training school for higher efforts, and the ablest intellects and ripest scholars are the first removed.

We cannot point out any religious or moral enterprise that has ever permanently suffered by the removal of human agents. Others are invariably raised up sooner or later to occupy the place of those who fall, and carry forward the work beyond the point aimed at by their predecessors. The leaves of autumn that soon will cover the ground and be trodden under foot, but give place to others that shall adorn the trees in coming spring. They filled up their appointed time of life in the vegetable world, and now according to the fixed laws of nature drop off from the naked branches. So it is with man, in the more extensive field of human activity. One generation cometh, and another goeth, but the vast and intricate purposes of Almighty wisdom continue to be advanced and perfected.

But should no workers rise up to take the place of those who fall, is the Almighty dependent upon the aid of mortals? Does infinite Power and Wisdom need the co-operation of feeble men? Is that hand that spanned the firmament, and set the sun in mid-heavens, and gave bounds to the ocean which it cannot pass, become so powerless, that the care of the universe is a burden and the upholding of created things a weariness? Has that infinite intellect that at first planned the order of the universe, and through countless centuries of duration has continued to direct and superintend the affairs of men, become so weak and foolish as no longer to be able to direct and guide, and to be altogether dependent upon the counsel and wisdom of fallible and short-sighted men? No; far from it. Did no human beings exist, were He left alone, as in a past eternity, without angel to adore or creature to

praise, his plans and purposes would be as certain of fulfilment, as if surrounded by the hosts of heaven, and myriads of the redeemed and saints on earth, to execute His commands.

Old Lyman Beecher was a man not usually given to despondency; but at times he almost lost his faith in God. When Dr. Cornelius, Secretary of the American Board of Foreign Missions, died, one of his sons tells us he had a very dark day. "I cannot understand," he says, "what the Lord means when His work needs just such a man as Cornelius, and He takes him away in the prime of life, at a time when he is carrying on the work successfully, and there is nobody to take his place." *But there was somebody ready.* Dr. Wisner took it, but he only carried it on a few years, and died also. "I well remember," says the son of Beecher referred to, "the morning when father was preparing the sermon to preach over Dr. Wisner. The wheels dragged heavily. He was very much cast down. Though I was quite young, he said to me—'Henry, it is all done! It is all done! I cannot see what the Lord means. He is making breach after breach. There is so much to do and so few to do it! He is taking the best of them.'" And so perhaps we have all felt, when year after year God smites the tall cedars of Lebanon and shatters the pillars of the church and the state. Yet in spite of these removals, the work goes on, and the cause of truth advances to completion.

The lesson that these frequent removals of the great and good teaches us is the comparative insignificance of any one man in the field of Christian effort. We may not boast of our wisdom or importance in the scale of being.

"We cannot too soon convince ourselves," says Goethe, „how easily we may be dispensed with in the world. What important personages we imagine ourselves to be! We think that we alone are the life of the circle in which we move; in our absence we fancy that life, existence and breath, will come to a general pause! And alas! the gap which we leave is scarcely perceptible, so quickly is it filled again." After all, how little can any one individual accomplish! When we survey the work that awaits completion—the vast details of human ignorance and suffering that stretch out on every hand—the feeling of utter helplessness, rather than self-sufficiency, should be uppermost in the mind. We can do so little, that at times it seems as if it were no use to put forth effort; and were it not for the assurance that along with us, myriads of workers are engaged in the same sublime and noble work, and that God Himself stands behind and above us, superintending, directing and crowning all with His blessed spirit, we should despair of anything like adequate results.

II. God often calls away his people when in full possession of physical strength. So with Moses. There was brightness in his eye—vigor and elasticity in his step. The burden of one hundred and twenty years pressed lightly upon him. "His eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated." And so it is now. But few of the human family approach the age of Moses, and how very many die in early life, when their bones are full of marrow and their breasts are full of milk. Death is at all times dreaded, but we have a special horror of it when it comes in the heyday of physical strength,—before the machinery is worn out, and when the blood courses freely in the veins and life sparkles in the eye. The day is expected to close and the sun to

set at eventide, but a sudden and total eclipse of the sun at mid-day is fearful.

God stood with Moses on the Mount, and pointed out to his servant the boundaries of the promised land. (v. 2-4.) What were his feelings in that awfully solemn moment we cannot tell. Doubtless there was gratitude to God, for sparing him through such an eventful life to gaze upon such a sight;—that the possession of Canaan by Israel was now assured, and that the great "I Am" who had appeared to him in the burning bush, would still be with Joshua and with the people. Before the Israelites would take possession of Canaan, he would have taken possession of a nobler throne than David's, and become a King and a Priest unto God. As James Montgomery describes the scene :

"He climbed the mountain and behold
The land before him lay;
Here Jordan's boundary waters roll'd,
There Carmel stretched away.
Where strangers' lives the Patriarchs led,
There promis'd Canaan smiled,
From Northern Lebanon outspread
To Araby the wild.

"In silent trance the Prophet gazed,
'It is enough,' he cried,
His hands with holy transport raised,
Saw the Lord's Christ and died.
His soul returned to God who gave,
His body nowhere found,
Shall keep the secret of its grave
Till the last trumpet sound."

"Thou also shalt be gathered unto thy people, as Aaron thy brother was gathered," was the intimation made to Moses of his approaching death (Numbers, chap. 27, v. 12-18.) "Gathered unto thy people" is a favorite expression in the Old Testament Scriptures, signifying death. It referred to the custom of laying the Patriarchs side by side

in the consecrated ground of Canaan—a feeling which has come down to the present, and finds a ready response in the human heart.

“’Tis little, but it looks in truth
As if the quiet bones were blest
Among familiar names to rest,
And in the places of his youth.”

In the case of Moses he could not literally lie side by side with the Patriarchs, for he was buried alone in a valley of the land of Moab, and no man knoweth his grave to this day. “No human eye has ever looked upon the place of his sepulchre, and no pilgrim’s foot has ever trod the path that leads to the sacred spot.” But in the highest sense he was gathered to his people,—to meet with those who for years had been the sharers of his toil and the companions of his sorrows, and who had preceded him to the rest and reward of Canaan. Aaron was gone and Miriam was gone! The friends and companions of his early life—all had passed away, and why should he grieve to follow? And so to believers now, death is not separation but re-union. It is but a gathering to their people; and should our bones not lie beside the dust of near and dear ones in the far off grave yard, the spirit shall in heaven meet those it loves. Then there shall be recognition—hallowed memories of the past—family meetings without break or future interruption.

Brethren, are you preparing to follow departed friends? When you stand by the open grave or close in death the eyes of dying saints, who seem so full of joy, as if the fiery chariot were awaiting their release, do you feel that death is but going home?—not isolation—not the ushering of the soul into a strange unfriendly land, but the union of kind-

red souls—the consummation of all that is blessed and inviting in Christian friendship! If so, then to you, the bitterness of death is past.

There are two things that minister peace and satisfaction in a dying hour, whether the call comes late or early :

I.—The retrospect of a useful life, to the extent of our ability and opportunity. We may have accomplished nothing great, as greatness is measured by the world,—nothing considered worthy of immortal memory in sculptured bronze or historic page. And yet in the juster estimate of the omniscient one, we may be accounted worthy of the noblest rewards that heaven can bestow. “She hath done what she could,” was said of a poor obscure woman ;—without riches—without intellectual endowments—without opportunities for attracting notice, because of her devotion to the cause of Christ. Long since she entered upon her reward, but her memory will survive when pyramids have crumbled into dust and earths nobles’ have all been forgotten. Said James Therrall, an old carpenter, on Salisbury Plain to a young Christian who complained that she was unworthy to serve the Lord :—“I used to think as you do, but the Lord taught me otherwise by a crooked stick. One day my son went to a sale of timber, and in the lot he bought, was a piece so twisted and bent that I said sharply, ‘It will be of no use.’ ‘Wait a bit—don’t fret ; let us keep a lookout, father,’ said the lad, ‘there is a place somewhere for it.’ And so it proved, for soon after, when I was building a house, there was a corner to turn in, and not a stick in the yard would fit it. I thought of the crooked one, and fetched it. It seemed as if the tree had grown aside for that purpose. ‘There,’ said I, ‘there is a place for the crooked stick, after all ;

then there's a place for poor James Therrall ! Dear Lord, show him the place in which he may fit, in the building of the heavenly temple.' That very day, poor and unlearned as I was, there was a work for me. And so there is a work for you to do, and nobody else can do it."

There is no man living but may enjoy this source of satisfaction in a dying hour, by directing his energies towards some department of Christian work. You are just as much called to serve God as was Moses, when at the burning bush he received instructions to go to the court of Pharaoh and demand the liberation of the Israelites, and lead them to the promised land. There was but one leader, but there were many subordinate officers, who united their efforts to that of Moses, and carried on the warfare that resulted in the occupation of Canaan. And so now, in the church, while under Christ there are visible heads, every member must bear his portion of the labor. This is God's plan ; this is the New Testament idea of a church ; this is the method whereby the Almighty intends the world to be evangelized and the latter—day glory to be hastened.

Do not delay then till the close of life asking the all important question, "What am I doing for the good of souls?" The Christian's estimate of life, however useful and industriously filled up, is often humiliating and saddening in the last moments of existence. There is so much incompleteness, so little actual achievement, and so much that savors of self in all our efforts, that the best life seems unprofitable. Yet such a man can say, "although my house is not so with God, yet hath he made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure, for this is all my salvation and all my desire."

II—But the best reflection in a dying hour is the knowledge of forgiveness through atoning blood. With this good hope, a man need not fear to ascend Mount Pisgah and survey the goodly land.

Such were the feelings of Moses when about to resign his spirit to his Maker's hands ;—of the dying martyr Stephen, who saw the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God ;—of Paul, who could say "I have finished my course, I have kept the faith ;"—of Samuel Rutherford, who said to the messenger that summoned him to appear before the Council at Edinburgh, "Tell them I have got a summons already before a superior Judge and Judicatory, and I behoove to answer my first summons. Ere your day arrives, I shall be where few kings and great folks come." Such joy in the prospect of death all may experience. Nothing but the blood of Christ can pacify the soul at such a crisis.

Our time on earth is fast drawing to a close. What we intend to do must be done at once.

"The battle of our life is brief
The alarm—the struggle—the relief,
Then sleep we side by side."

There is no rest this side of heaven. We speak of leisure in the evening of our days,—of retiring from business,—of selecting some lovely spot in a sequestered vale, where, as in an earthly paradise, we may be far from the hum of commerce, fanned by balmy zephyrs and reclining on silken couches. But ere we have entered upon our golden age, the grim messenger of death shatters our hopes and leaves the stately mansion without its Lord ! Let us moderate human aspirations and increase our longings

after what is divine and imperishable. Were it given to us now, as it was given Moses, to look within the veil, we would no longer be afraid to die !

"O, could we make our doubts remove,
These gloomy doubts that rise ;
And view the Canaan that we love,
With unclouded eyes.

"Could we but climb where Moses stood,
And view the landscape o'er ;
Nor Jordan's stream, nor death's cold flood,
Should fright us from the shore."

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ALL THINGS WITH CHRIST.

"He that spared not his own son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him freely give us all things?" Romans 8, v, 32.

The text is one of a series of golden links intended by the Apostle Paul, to show the certainty of salvation to all God's people. His argument is that the blessings of redemption are not independent of each other, but rather that they are all closely related. Hence, the called cannot doubt, but that they have been predestinated, and the justified, that in due time they will be glorified. If such be the final happiness of believers, why the Apostle argues should they murmur at what befalls them? All things work together for their good. That same love which chose them in a past eternity, shall undoubtedly preserve them to the end. "The Lord will give grace and glory, and no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly."

The Apostle, at all times eloquent and powerful, seems in this chapter to excel himself. Language fails him when attempting to pourtray the present blessedness and future glory of God's people. As he stands surveying the wondrous plan of mercy, so enimently adapted to secure the end intended, he bursts forth into the rapturous language of our text. "What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not his own son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?"

Let us consider for a little the fact stated. *God has given us already the strongest possible proof of his love.* "He spared not his own son, but delivered him up for us all." This same truth is frequently stated in the Bible, but the language employed in the present instance is peculiarly striking. There is given us as it were, a glimpse of the struggle which took place, when the Father parted from his beloved son. Look at the gift. Not worlds nor systems of worlds;—these were poor and insignificant things in comparison;—not the highest created intelligences of heaven,—but his son. Not an adopted son, nor a son in the sense that men and angels are the sons of God, but his only begotten and well beloved son—his co-equal in nature—the brightness of his glory—the express image of his person and the sharer of his throne from the unborn ages of eternity. This son *he spared not*. The negative phrase has a positive meaning. He gave him up freely and ungrudgingly. As from the heights of heaven, he gazed upon our ruined world and listened to the wailings of fallen humanity, his eye pitied and his heart melted—he spared him not, but freely gave him up to die. Nay,

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not only did he not spare him *from suffering*, but he did not spare him *when he suffered*. He put the bitter cup of wrath into his hands, and that cup he drank to the very dregs. The flaming sword of divine justice fell upon his sinless person. The cry went forth "awake O, sword against my shepherd and against the man that is my fellow, smite the shepherd and the sheep shall be scattered." "It pleased the Lord to bruise him. He hath put him to grief. He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him: and with his stripes we are healed."

It is easy to read the story of Christs sufferings, but who can estimate their character and intensity? These sufferings arose not from the persecution of ungodly men, or the abandonment of friends, but chiefly from the wrath and desertion of a holy God. Whence these mournful cries in Gethsemane and on the cross:—"Father if it be possible, let this cup pass from me, nevertheless not my will, but thine be done. My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Surely such mental anguish proceeds not from human weakness, nor from fear of death, nor from the agonizing tortures of the accursed tree, but because his heart was broken under the burden of our sins. He alone could fully understand and comprehend the extent of that misery and the depth of that guilt, which demanded such a sacrifice. His soul was crucified with his body; his heart was pierced with sharper nails than those that penetrated his mortal frame. Well may we say:

"Oh, what wonders love has done?
 But how little understood,
 God well knows, and God alone
 What produced that sweat of blood.
 Who can thy deep wonders see,
 Wonderful Gethsemane?"

There, my God bore all my guilt,
This through grace can be believed :
But the horrors which he felt,
Are too vast to be conceived.
None can penetrate through thee,
Doleful, dark, Gethsemane !"

And for whom all this suffering ? The Apostle tells us in the contest. "He delivered him up for us all:"—for those whom God foreknew and predestinated to be conformed to the image of Christ, who being called are justified, and being justified, shall eventually be glorified. Christ died to redeem a people to himself. For personal sins he could not suffer, for he was holy, harmless, undefiled and separate from sinners. No guilt was found on his lips—no pollution ever stained his soul. But he was made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. He suffered in our room and stead. His tears and groans—his heart sorrows and bitter lamentations, were all endured on our behalf. But for such suffering, we should have endured throughout eternity.

Think once more in this connection of the language. *God* spared not his own son. The maker of the universe—the creator of our bodies and the inspirer of our spirits ! He against whom we had impiously rebelled, disowning his authority, and scorning his lawful demands. *That God* loved us. The God who spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and has reserved them in chains and darkness against the great day of judgment—gave his son to redeem us from eternal death ! To accept such a statement, demands strong faith and a heart which has in some measure experienced the love of Christ. Mere intellect can never credit it. To unconverted men, this, like all other precious gospel truths, must seem very

foolishness. When some petty province rises in rebellion against its rightful sovereign, no treaty of peace is offered until the insurgents sue for pardon. Justice exacts and demands her rights, and never yields, until the land is turned into barrenness and desolation, and the blood of thousands drench the ground. But God, in order to bring back this wandering planet to its orbit, and restore it to its wonted place in the fair sisterhood of unfallen worlds, gave as it were *himself* for its salvation. "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself. Without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory." What a halo of glory does this throw around the divine character? What a lustre encircles the eternal's throne? Just as the shepherd in eastern climes, goes after the the wandering sheep, and seeks it till he finds it;—just as the loving parent, travels the world over for the restoration of the prodigal son or erring daughter,—does God seek after the return of guilty men. "He spared not his own son, but delivered him up for us all."

"Thus wisdom's works discover,
Thy glory and thy grace;
Thou everlasting lover,
Of an unworthy race:
Thy gracious eye surveyed us,
E'er stars were seen above.

Unfathomable wonder
And mystery divine!
The voice that speaks in thunder,
Says Sinner "I am thine."

In the second place, consider the inference deduced.
"He spared not his own son, but delivered him up for us

all—he shall *with him* give us all things freely.” How shall he not say the Apostle? Any other conclusion is unreasonable—impossible. God has already given us the best of all proofs of his love—his most precious gift. He gave us this gift when we were estranged from him, and in the attitude of rebels; now when we are reconciled to him, and have become his sons and daughters by adoption, and are no longer the objects of his displeasure but rather of his affection, can we place any limit to the exercise of his goodness? If the father is bound by the laws of natural affection to provide for his offspring, will not God most gladly supply all the wants of his own dear children? If in our state of hostility he gave us the greater, in our state of reconciliation, he will assuredly grant us the less. He gave Christ as the pioneer of every other blessing—as the pledge of grace here, and the earnest of glory hereafter. His death has purchased everything we need in the present or future. Jesus Christ came into our world and died, not simply to confer a temporary benefit upon his people, but to ensure them everlasting happiness. The salvation offered, is a perfect salvation. The great end contemplated by God, is not consummated, until the believer reaches heaven. Every predestinated soul shall be glorified. Not one shall be wanting of all that the Father has given to the son. Once in Christ, the believer is there forever. If called, he is justified—if justified he is sanctified, and so soon as sanctification renders the image perfect, glory follows. “All things” are given, and “all things” work together for this final result.

The “all things” refer alike to temporal and spiritual wants. If the children of Israel are to possess Ca-

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naan, they must be provided for and protected through the journey of the wilderness. Only thus can the promise made to their fathers be fulfilled. And in like manner, God cares for the material and the spiritual, the lower and the higher necessities of the christians existence. Heaven and earth are comprehended in the promise. All things we need ;—not all things we desire ;—all that God deems useful for us, in advancing our eternal interests. "All things are yours, whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or death, or things present, or things to come ; all are yours, and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's." "If children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ." The good things of this world are a part—though comparatively small and insignificant—of the christian's portion. He may be in it indeed, as Abraham of old, a pilgrim and a stranger, without so much as a burial place he can call his own, but the just shall ultimately inherit the earth ;—not as it now exists, with its fleeting honors and empty pageantry, but cleansed and purified—governed by righteousness and filled with God's glory.

Now, in view of this high destiny that awaits the child of God, nothing is withheld that can possibly enrich his soul. The death of Christ, while it ensures the bestowment of all gifts and graces, is not in itself all that the daily growth of the believer demands. Grace in the heart must be fed and nourished. The fluctuations of spiritual life must be provided for. Pardon and forgiveness and the sprinkling of atoning blood upon the conscience, prepared for the entire sanctification of his nature and possession of the inheritance of the saints in light. Adopted into God's family, the soul must be enlightened, quickened,

established in the faith, until the measure of the stature of Christ is reached. "Father, I will,"—says the Saviour in his valedictory prayer,—“that they whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory, which Thou hast given me. I in them, and Thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one.” This is the grand end of Christ's death, when he shall see of the travail of his soul and shall be satisfied. This thought thrilled the Saviour in the dark hours of his awful sorrow. His eye looked forward through coming ages to that happy hour, when a numerous throng of blood-washed saints should be gathered into heaven, when the eternal covenant made between the Father and the Son should be fulfilled in all its details, and the angelic choir swell the song of a completed redemption.

Do you then, my hearers, unhesitatingly accept the statement that *with Christ* God will give us all things freely;—that your salvation is placed beyond all peradventure,—and that nothing can intervene to change the promise or stain the faithfulness of the Almighty? Do you rest contented in the assurance that as all your wants are known to him, all your wants will be supplied? The story is told, illustrating the simple faith that my text demands, of an aged saint, who lived many years ago in a little mud-thatched cottage, by the side of a rippling brook, in one of the secluded glens of Scotland. She was waiting patiently and cheerfully for the moment of release. By her bedside, on a small table, lay her spectacles and her well-thumbed Bible—her barrel and cruise as she used to call it—from which she fed on the bread of life. A young minister frequently called to see her, listening with amazement to her simple faith, as she spoke of the inheritance—

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incorruptible and undefiled—which seemed but a little way off, and as real as the cottage she inhabited. One day he put to her the startling question:—"Now, Nanny, what if after all your prayers, and watchings, and waiting, God should suffer your soul to be eternally lost?" She raised herself on her elbow, and, turning towards him a wistful look, laid her hand upon the open Bible which was near her, adding, "Ah me, is that all the length you have got! In such a case God would have the greatest loss. Poor Nanny would but lose her soul, and that would be a great loss indeed; but God would lose his honor and his character. Hav'n't I hung my soul upon his exceeding great and precious promises, and if he break his word, he would make himself a liar, and all the universe would rush into confusion." What simple faith and sound philosophy these words contain! God had thus far provided for his child, and now when about to leave the wilderness for her eternal home, she was confident that his faithfulness would continue to the end. Her soul rested upon the argument of the text: "He that spared not his own son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things."

Mark still further the words,—*with Christ* he will give us *freely* all things. He gave Christ freely, and all the remaining gifts, are as but a few drops of rain, compared with the inexhaustible supplies of the boundless ocean. The greatness of the first gift has neither weakened his love nor his power. Our God is infinite. His resources are unfailing. He is love itself. He delights to give, and he gives with royal lavishness. We limit God's bounteous liberality by the feebleness of our prayers. Never can we know the overflowing tenderness and compassion that exist

in the bosom of God, until we have drawn from the fountainhead, and in some measure comprehended the breadth, and length, and depth, and height of the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge.

He gives *freely*. Let me endeavor to illustrate my meaning. Once there was a poor woman standing before the window of a royal conservatory. It was the dead of winter, and no flowers were in the gardens and no fruit upon the trees. But in the hot house a splendid bunch of grapes hung from the glass ceiling, basking in the winter sun, and as the poor woman gazed at it, she sighed and said, "Oh, I wish I could take it to my sick darling." She went home to her spinning wheel and wrought day and night, till she had earned half a crown. She then went to the King's gardener and offered all she had for the bunch of grapes, but was scornfully repulsed. She returned home, and selling some few necessary articles of clothing, went again to the King's gardener and offered him five shillings for the bunch of grapes. But the unfeeling man took her roughly by the arm and ordered her away. It happened that the King's daughter was near at hand, and when she heard the angry words of the gardener, and saw the tears of the woman, she enquired into the matter. Hearing the story from her lips, the noble Princess said with a kind smile, "My dear woman you were mistaken, *my father is not a merchant, but a King*; his business is not to sell, but to *give*," whereupon she plucked the bunch of grapes from the vine, and gently dropped it into the woman's apron, making over to her as a free gift what the labor of many days and nights was unable to procure. It is so with God's bounties. He gives lavishly,—ungrudgingly,—without money and without price. All the ma-

terial riches of the world cannot purchase salvation, and all the efforts of a life time cannot merit grace.

Finally notice, that it is only with Christ that we obtain all needed blessings. The property goes along with the heir or heiress ; the interest accompanies the principal. The person of Christ and the benefits of his atonement are inseparable. First take Christ, and then with Christ receive all things. Refuse Christ, and we are destitute of everything valuable in the present or the future. Unconverted men have no claim upon the temporal mercies of existence, for these, with the higher bestowments of the Spirit, have all been purchased by the death of Christ.

This subject affords comfort to Christians in every condition of life. You may be poor and obscure, but yours is the wealth of unknown worlds. Nor is it dependent upon man's capricious will, nor contingent upon the fluctuations of commerce. It does not consist in bonds, and bills, and promissory notes ; in gold and silver, or piles of masonry, which may all perish in a moment, and leave you in beggary and want. Enough of such material good you may possess to render life enjoyable, but in such things true happiness does not consist. Yours are the treasures laid up where moth and rust corrupt not, and where thieves break not through nor steal. The external changes of this present scene do not permanently affect the child of God. In the midst of ruin and desolation, he can calmly commit the keeping of his soul, and the disposal of his affairs to God, who can never forswear himself, nor swerve from his promise. The minor trials of the present but augment the rapturous joy of the future. What can any soul further seek who possesses Christ, and

with him pardon and peace, justification and forgiveness,—the Holy Spirit now and glory beyond the grave,—grace for every duty, comfort in every trial, and support in a dying hour ?

If God's people are so blessed, how wretched must be the condition of impenitent ones, who despise the riches of heaven, and scorn his patience and forbearance. A man who by some mysterious providence has been reduced from affluence to poverty is indeed deserving of our sympathy and pity. Much more indeed the man, who, whatever be his worldly condition, has no interest beyond the grave. To such, let me address the language of Scripture : "I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich ; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear ; and anoint thine eyes with salve, that thou mayest see." Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and these things—the lesser bounties and blessings of Providence—shall be added unto you.

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RENEWING STRENGTH.

"They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength: they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary, and they shall walk and not faint."—Isaiah xl, v. 31.

The text literally translated reads as follows - "They that expect the Lord, pass on to power; they raise up the pinion as eagles; they run and are not fatigued, they go on and faint not." The idea is much the same as in our version,—the imparting of new and greater strength in the ripper years of christian experience. It is the natural strength of the eagle that is renewed or changed, but it is the spiritual powers of the christian that are intensified. In regard to man's physical constitution it does not hold good, that in declining years when furrows track the brow, and hoary hairs cover the head, he becomes stronger and firmer in bone and muscle, and more capable of endurance. Some few instances there are where men seem stronger in old age than in youth, but these are the exception. When we pass the meridian of life,—when our sun reaches

and passes its zenith,—when the shadows lengthen and the twilight deepens, we expect symptoms of decay. In the words of the wise King of Israel, “the keepers of the house tremble, the windows are darkened, the almond tree flourishes, the grasshopper becomes a burden and desire fails. Finally, man goeth to his long home, while the mourners go about the streets.”

All who know anything of natural history are acquainted with the fact brought before us. At certain periods the eagle moults, losing the old and gradually gaining new feathers. During this period it feels weak and languishing,—incapable of mounting upwards or putting forth its wondrous displays of power. But after it has renewed its pinions, its power of flight is immensely increased. It then soars heavenward, until it almost passes out of sight, and seems to gaze upon the sun with steadfast eye. So says the prophet, are they who wait upon the Lord. There is no limit to the possibilities of supernatural power, that the weakest Christian may attain, who holds communion with his Maker. Refreshed, renewed and invigorated,—with higher aims and holier aspirations, he passes onward and upward, until faith gives place to vision, and earth is swallowed up in heaven's brightness.

That the source of this power is altogether divine, the context teaches. The whole chapter is a grand eulogy upon the unchanging, eternal and omnipotent attributes of Jehovah. All flesh is grass and fades like the flower, but God and his word endure for ever. He measures the waters in the hollow of his hand,—he metes out heaven with a span;—he comprehends the dust of the earth in a measure,—he weighs the mountains in scales and the hills

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in a balance. He sits upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants are as grasshoppers. The stars in the heaven are his handiwork:—he marshals them as a host, and calls them by their names. With him there is no such thing as weariness or fainting. On the contrary, he gives power to the faint and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. As if the prophet said, "Why doubt the ability and willingness of such a God, to bear his people upon angels' wings, and succor them in times of danger. He is not liable to change and accident, nor unreliable and uncertain as the fitful winds of heaven, but solid and immutable as the eternal rocks. In no condition of life need we distrust his grace or doubt his love!"

The language of the text, while surpassingly beautiful and striking, appeals to a depth of experience which can hardly be translated into human language. It baffles all attempts at a thorough exposition. To profess to know those hidden processes, by which the Almighty communicates of his infinite resources to the needy saint, and describe the properties of this strength, is more foolish than to sound the ocean with a plumb-line. Who can by searching find out God,—who can find out the Almighty to perfection? Who shall reveal the mysteries of that electric fire, that descending upon the child of God, infuses new vigor to his soul and fits him for the trials and struggles of existence? The heart so touched, and the character thus ennobled by the mighty inspirations of God's grace, must interpret and expand our feeble words!

To "wait upon the Lord," in the ordinary acceptance of the phrase is to attend upon the ordinary means of grace. These, however, though the more general methods

of spiritual intercourse between man and his Maker, are not by any means the only, nor the most valuable. Secret prayer—the bowing of the knee in private, when no other eye looks on but that of the Almighty, and nothing is present to divide the attention or distract the thoughts, is more precious still, for the cultivation of the highest form of holiness. The public devotions of the sanctuary, are necessary to all who would maintain the semblance of a consistent life;—but the higher attainments of faith and hope, are reserved for those who pass into the pavilion and are hidden within the shadow of the mercy seat. Taking up one by one the more prominent and useful men of the past or present, we find that in every instance, they not only loved the church and her ministrations, but dwelt apart for long periods from the noise and turmoil of the world, and refreshed their souls at the fountain of living waters. Whence did Moses obtain that matchless patience and heroism, that qualified him for the leadership of Israel, but in the desert of Midian, where for forty years he kept the flocks of Jethro, and upon Mount Sinai, where alone with God for forty days and forty nights, he breathed the air of heaven, and basked in the light of Jehovah's countenance. Whence did Daniel and Elijah, and in later days John the Baptist, derive that lion-like courage and majesty of deportment, that made them the vicegerents of the Almighty, and enabled them without the fear of man, to scatter the thunderbolts of heaven against the abominations of the age? And whence in more modern days of persecution, did weak and timid men and women procure that amazing intrepidity and indifference to torture that has gained for them the proud name of martyr, and enrolled their acts of stern endurance among the marvels of

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human history? Simply and only by waiting upon God. Like Samson of old shorn of his locks, these men and women of themselves were helpless before their enemies,—the sport and pastime of the cruel-hearted and profane;—but by waiting upon God, they received a heroism of soul and a power of defiance that shook the world—revolutionized society—caused Kings and Cardinals to tremble upon their thrones, and foiled the cunning policy and wicked combinations of unprincipled men!

Waiting upon God is much insisted upon in the old Testament Scriptures. It was the daily life of saints in these early days. Hence we find such language as our text in great abundance. "*I waited patiently for the Lord, and he inclined unto me and heard my cry.*" *Truly my soul waiteth upon God, from him cometh my salvation.*" "*My soul wait thou only upon God, for my expectation is from him.*" "Rest in the Lord and *wait patiently for him, and he shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light and thy judgment as the noon day.*" The former dispensation was one of expectancy. Patriarchs and Prophets were waiting for the fulfilment of the promise—the redemption of Israel. Their life was one of child-like trust and joyous hope. And thus we read, that when the devout Simeon took up the infant Saviour in his arms, he gave expression to this same feeling now realized in his experience: "Lord now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation."

But the habit of waiting upon God, is not to be confined to old Testament times. It is a duty incumbent upon all believers, and a privilege which none can value but such as engage in it. It is not only desire and expect-

tation, but patient submission under delays and disappointments, until the expected good is realized. Men do not wait for things undesirable, nor for which they have no good grounds of expectation. In proportion to the value of the expected good, and the certainty of its bestowal is the patient waiting. The husbandman waits for the fruits of the ground in the time of harvest, because the promise has been given, that "while the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night, shall not cease." Having fulfilled on his part, all the conditions necessary to ensure a bountiful harvest, he waits with patience for a return for all his labor. Waiting upon God then, implies the patient looking for and expectation of certain grand results in our own individual history or the moral government of the world, which God has promised us will be realized. It is not a state of mental inactivity or passivity. It does not hinder us from putting forth every exertion to secure certain results. It does not in the smallest degree conflict with active effort, whether it be for the securing of our own best interests or those of our fellow men. On the contrary it implies, that we have done all that is possible, for the attainment of certain ends, and then, leaving the whole matter in the hands of God, cheerfully and patiently wait until in his own good time, he brings about the issue. Thus the Apostle James counsels the early christians. "Be patient therefore brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain. Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh."

Waiting upon God further implies, patience under

mysterious providences. This is an essential grace in christian experience. In the unfolding of God's purposes and the development of his plans, he often seems to be slow and tardy. This is alike true in the history of individuals and nations. Geologists tell us, that long ages were consumed in preparing this earth to be the habitation of man, after that the fiat of Jehovah had called matter into existence. It is equally certain, that in the moral regeneration of the world—in the purification of society from vice, and every form of iniquity and oppression that have stained humanity since the fall, long periods of time are necessary. *This is God's plan.* He might have willed it otherwise. He might have scattered the light and beauty of holiness over our world, and continued its existence undimmed by the dark shadows of sin which obstruct the vision, just as at first, he spake light into being, and has ever since caused the sun to shine upon the earth. Or he might in a single century after the fall of man, have brought back this ruined and revolted world into a state of harmony and allegiance. But it has been otherwise ordered. The plans of his moral government are such, that it is only after long delays—after fearful struggles between right and wrong, good and evil, justice and oppression, that he seems to close the contest and bring about a glorious issue. The confusion and discord that exist in the world—the apparent mingling of good and evil—the seemingly unjust distribution of rewards and punishments, and the ten thousand events that transpire from day to day, are to human reason so irreconcilable and contradictory, that unless we wait patiently for the intervention of God's power, when an all-wise providence shall scatter rays of light amid the darkness, we are certain to despair of all hope for the race.

Men often forget that it is in this way that God governs the world. They reflect upon his wisdom and call in question his justice ; and not unfrequently fall back into practical atheism. By nature we are impatient. We expect to see the seeds of truth and justice which are planted to-day, bear fruit to-morrow. We cannot brook delay, and refuse to yield to God's arrangements. We think it surpassing strange that centuries should pass without bringing us nearer social perfection and universal happiness. And when by reason of war and bloodshed, nations are rent in pieces, and civilization seems to give place to the barbarism of the dark ages, we are still more bewildered and confounded. Now, it is by *waiting upon God* that we acquire patience under such mysterious providences, and are enabled to understand what little we can of God's character and plans. God trains his people for glorious enterprises and high destinies, by mysterious dispensations. Sometimes he reveals to them the cause of such incomprehensible dealings, but in most instances they are kept profoundly secret, until that great day when what is now unknown shall be understood, and the ways of God to man, vindicated before an assembled world.

Waiting upon God, finally implies a momentary looking for his coming, whether to call the individual believer home, or to settle the affairs of this sin-accursed and long agitated world. It is the upward glance of faith waiting in readiness for the Master's command. It is the confident assurance that special manifestations of his power and revelations of his presence, will be given to his suffering church and people. David, in one of the psalms, expresses the idea of the text : " Behold as the eyes of ser-

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vants look unto the hand of the master; so our eyes wait upon the Lord our God, until that he have mercy upon us." The bride expecting the bridegroom assumes a more cheerful and happy frame, as the time approaches when she is to rejoice in his presence, and lean upon his arm. And so the saint in view of immortal youth and never fading joys in heaven, can cheerfully bear up under the sorrows of the present.

The human soul, in its most depressed and helpless moments, is susceptible of wondrous stimulus. Motives may be presented and considerations brought before the mind, that so thrill and move the entire being, as enable the hitherto hopeless child of earth to aspire after the efforts of supernal beings. The power of mind over matter in such moments is evident, and much of this power is derived from looking to the future, and trusting in some fancied good that may or may not be realized. The poorest wretch on earth may thus for a time be stimulated to endeavour; and the effort thus put forth, is beneficial to the soul. And thus in christian life, our strength is greatly increased by looking to the future, and believing that when he who is our life shall appear, we shall also appear with him in glory. The captives in Babylon, doubtless kept alive their patriotism and piety, by looking forward to release from bondage and the ultimate possession of Jerusalem. Their sorrow would have been unbearable, but for the promises given to their fathers, that the Holy City, should again be theirs, and days of joy succeed their nights of weeping. And to the converted Jew, no greater comfort can now be given, than the assurance that Mount Zion shall yet be the possession of the chosen seed. In like manner the believer expects his Lord and looks for his

appearing. As he meditates upon the wonders of the latter day, the fire burns within his soul, and he feels equal to any service the master may impose. "Expecting the Lord, he passes on to strength."

Let me now briefly speak of this strength as applied in christian experience. There is strength *to resist temptation—to endure trial, and to reach the higher altitudes of the christian life.*

No man however holy and guarded in his deportment can withstand temptation, apart from the constantly imparted power of heaven. Like the Israelites, who needed daily supplies of heaven, so we need daily and hourly supplies of grace. It was strength thus afforded, that enabled Joseph to resist temptation in the house of Potiphar, saying "How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" It was the same strength that enabled Moses, heir apparent to the throne of Egypt, to refuse the honor of being called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, "choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season." It was the same strength that came to the help of Job, in the hour of his terrible distress, when his wife instigated him to blaspheme the most high, and reproach the hand that smote him. "What—says the Patriarch,—shall we receive good at the hand of the Lord and not receive evil? Nay, with reverence be it said, this same almighty strength, enabled Christ upon the cross, calmly and meekly to bear the reproaches of his persecutors. "He saved others—let him save himself—if he be the Christ the son of God," exclaimed the murderous mob at the base of Calvary. "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do," was the only answer

that fell from the lips of the dying Redeemer. We may not have the same strong temptations placed before us, as the saints of old, but there are sufficient every day, to drive us to our Maker for preventing grace. Some of you looking back on the past can recognise decisions, made in the face of human reason, and against the advice of friends which seemed at the time utter folly; and yet they were your salvation temporally and spiritually. Strong inducements were held out before you, to enter upon a course of conduct, that promised all that the human soul desires, and for the moment you were staggered how to act. The force of argument seemed all in favor of your boldly accepting the position, let consequences be what they might, and yet you were held back by an unseen hand, and said *No*, when all the world said *Yes*. To that *No* you are indebted for all that you have become in the church of Christ—"for the steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord, and he delighteth in his way." This strength also enables the believer to endure trials—nay converts them into real blessings. Paul afflicted with the thorn in the flesh, cried earnestly and repeatedly that it might depart. God refused his prayer, but gave him what was far better than the absence of affliction.—"My grace is sufficient for thee,—my strength is made perfect in weakness." "Most gladly therefore says the apostle will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me." It is such continued life-long sickness, whether of soul or body, or both combined, that most loudly calls for supernatural strength. Ordinary christians can endure the occasional ills of life, with the help of ordinary grace, but those who are scorched by the fires of affliction, need such faith, as sees one like the Son of man walking amid the

flames and protecting them from harm. What in such circumstances we are able to endure is indeed surprising. In the midst of death's ravages, when the forms of those we loved are torn from our arms and laid in the narrow grave and our days of watching and waiting upon them are over—calmly, resignedly and cheerfully we can stay ourselves upon God, and in the midst of tears and heaviness of heart, triumph over death. The most submissive of God's children, are those most acutely chastened. Their tears become so many telescopes by which they see the glories of the inner heavens, and every lightning flash that darts across their path-way, but reveals more and more the beauty of the Saviour.

Once again. By this divinely imparted strength, we are enabled to reach higher altitudes in the divine life. See yonder proud eagle, as it soars higher and higher, until it almost passes beyond our vision and appears but a speck in the blue dome of heaven. From that high elevation, cities look like villages, hamlets like mole hills, and trees like shrubs, until at last all are lost to view. For weeks that noble bird has sat within the nest featherless and pinionless, weak and languishing:—but now covered anew with gorgeous plumage and rejoicing in its new found strength it soars upward to the clouds. And so with the christian who for weeks and months has been pining in sadness and sackcloth! Now upon celestial wings he rises heavenward in his devotions. His thoughts are all about Jesus and his conversation concerning the glory to be revealed. The sun of righteousness becomes fuller and clearer to his spiritual vision, as the friendships of earth sink in his esteem;—until finally passing from the state of waiting and watching, he stands in the undimmed and unlouded presence of the Lamb.

HINDRANCES.

"So built we the wall.....I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down. Why should the work cease, while I leave it, and come down to you?"—Nehemiah iv., v. 6th, and vi., v. 8rd.

The little word "so" is emphatic. It refers to the many difficulties and dangers that interfered with their labor. In the palace of Shushan, Nehemiah heard of the affliction and reproach of his countrymen, and how the wall of Jerusalem had been broken down, and the gates burned with fire. The tidings filled his heart with great sadness. Having mourned and fasted, he prays to the God of Heaven that he might once more gather together his scattered children, and prosper his efforts in rebuilding Jerusalem. Coming into the King's presence, when asked why his countenance was so sad, he replied: "Why should not my countenance be sad, when the city, the place of my father's sepulchre, lieth waste, and the gates thereof are consumed with fire?" The King, who was kindly minded towards the distressed Jews, and especially towards his faithful servant, intimated his willingness to aid him in accomplishing the pious desire of his heart, and gives him leave of absence to go to the land of Israel and the sepulchre of his fathers, with instructions to the keepers of the King's

forest to furnish timber for the beams of the gates, and material for the walls of the city. Arrived at Jerusalem after three days' journey, Nehemiah rose in the night, and passed out into the darkness to view the desolations of the city. In proportion to his sorrow, was his energy and faith. On the morrow he summons his countrymen to aid him in repairing the waste places, that they might no longer be a reproach in the eyes of the heathen. Nor did he call in vain. With true patriotism they answered, "Let us arise and build;"—nor did they once relax their endeavors until the wall was restored, and the temple service revived, amid the grateful devotions of the assembled congregation.

Such a happy result was not reached without hard labor and constant vigilance. Beset as they were by secret and open enemies, they dared not for a moment relax their efforts. By night and by day, the walls had to be guarded against the attempts of Sanballat and his confederates, who alternately laughed them to scorn, or threatened them with death. As the covenanters of old, on many a bloody moor, held the Bible in one hand and the sword in another, so Nehemiah and his band of co-patriots in turn builded and prayed, and prayed and fought, while their leader inspired their hearts, to die if necessary rather than yield to their oppressors. "Be ye not afraid of them. Remember the Lord who is great and terrible, and fight for your brethren and your sons and your daughters, your wives and your houses."

I can imagine some timid hearted Jew, opposed to such dangerous and doubtful warfare: "Why offend these Ammonites and Horonites? Why stir up the anger of these men, who persuade us to abandon what indeed seems

a mad and foolish enterprise, and threaten bloodshed if we persevere? Surely if God wills, that Jerusalem shall be rebuilt, he will bring it to pass in less troublous times, and incline towards us the hearts of our neighbors. Are not these obstacles and hindrances sufficient intimation from heaven, that we are engaged in a hopeless cause, and that defeat and disaster must be the inevitable result?" And we can imagine—nay we do not need to imagine—such timid and craven hearted souls in every age and enterprise of the church, who retard the progress of the truth and damp the zeal and ardor of God's saints. When has any great moral reform been inaugurated, but there have been men who caused the chariot wheels to drag heavily and prophesied all sorts of evil regarding the issue? When has anything grand in missionary effort been projected, but some have been found not only unwilling to assist, but dissuading the more zealous and hopeful, advising them to be calm and cautious, lest failure and disappointment should be their reward. Disappointment! Why, in what department of labor do we not meet with unexpected reverses? The man who speaks thus is unfitted for the world of conflict, where defeats and repulses are but stimulants to greater achievements. There are no real repulses in God's work, although there are many seeming ones. The powers and principalities of this world, who fight against the King of Zion, cannot hinder or delay by a single day, the glorious issue of the contest. Nor must his servants tremble and become fainthearted, because of the dark forebodings of luke-warm Christians. Rather will we "arise and build." We will guard the walls, if need be, with one hand, while with the other we build, and never cease from labor until the corner stone of the temple is

laid, amid the rejoicings of the redeemed. "The street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times."

If we look for a little at the methods adopted to prevent the rebuilding of the wall, we shall the better understand the policy pursued by Satan and the enemies of the church in every age.

I.—When Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem and began an inspection of the work to be accomplished, his enemies were seriously agitated and grieved in mind. "It grieved them exceedingly that there was come a man to seek the welfare of the children of Israel." Why they should have been so sad about a matter that little concerned them, and far less would burden them, seems strange. Had Nehemiah possessed the power of compelling assistance or levying taxes to carry on the work, on all and sundry who lived near Jerusalem, they might have had good cause of complaint. In matters of religion no man's conscience must be coerced. He has a perfect right to exercise liberty in giving or not giving for the ordinances of religion. But no such thing did Nehemiah propose. As yet he had done nothing in the matter; his purpose had not even been disclosed to his countrymen. The timber had not arrived, nor had the workmen been engaged, and yet the prospect, however remote, of Jerusalem's restoration, filled them with intense bitterness. "They grieved exceedingly—or as it may be read,—it was a great evil to them that there was come a man to seek the welfare of the children of Israel."

II.—When Nehemiah and his fellow countrymen had determined on active measures his enemies endeavored by scorn and laughter to dissuade them from the work.

"They laughed us to scorn, and despised us, and said, What is this thing that ye will do? Will ye rebel against the King?" There was ample room, humanly speaking, for such an exhibition of wickedness. The Jews were comparatively few in number; they possessed no influence whatever; their resources were scanty and the work was great. At the present day, when Christians propose to excavate in and around Jerusalem, in order to read in the light of her ruins the truths of Scripture, the British Government contribute of the national resources and give to it the dignity of a national undertaking. But no such aid was given Nehemiah. Apart from the assistance of the Persian King, royalty had no part in this commendable undertaking. To the eye of reason it did indeed seem a foolish enterprise, although to a man of Nehemiah's faith, with whom all things were possible, its accomplishment was already a fixed and ascertained fact. And as regards the charge of disloyalty and rebellion, it was not believed by the men who used it as a threat. It was simply one of those after-thoughts, which wicked men invent and propagate from time to time, to hurt the fair fame of those, whose loyalty to heaven and attachment to the powers that be, are beyond all question. Men like Nehemiah, loyal to their Maker, will never engage in what is base and dishonorable towards earthly rulers. Following the Scripture rule "they render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, and unto God the things that are God's."

III.—As the work advanced towards a successful termination, the enemies of the Jews evinced their hostility by more open and warlike measures. "It came to pass, when they heard that the walls of Jerusalem were made up, and that the breaches began to be stopped, then they

were very wroth. And conspired all of them together to come and fight against Jerusalem and to hinder it. They shall not know, neither see, till we come in the midst among them, and slay them, and cause the work to cease." So spake Sanballat and the enemies of the Jews. Thus far they had failed to intimidate—the more they scoffed and threatened, the more rapidly the work went forward. Severer measures must be tried. "The walls must not be built. What these fanatical Jews finish in the day time we will destroy during the night, and if they resist us their blood be upon their own heads. We will teach them that might makes right, and that they cannot cope with our trained and skilful warriors, however persevering and successful they may be in the repairing of the walls." Nothing less than a war of extermination was thus projected. Between the Jews and the heathen tribes in question there were unsettled feuds of long standing. Once and again, these enemies of God's chosen people had been defeated—from the time of the wilderness journey up to the period of the Babylonish captivity. And now that the returned Jews were considerably reduced in numbers and weakened in material resources, it seemed a fitting time for these heathens to avenge past defeats. But the prospect of open hostilities and bloodshed did not in the least divert the Jews from their purpose, nor abate their enthusiasm. They had put their hand to the Lord's work, and would not be turned back even by the threat of death. They were confident that he who had inspired them to build, would, if need be, give them grace to suffer, and finally make them victorious over every foe.

IV.—When the work was nearly finished, these same men, by an apparent show of friendship, attempted to ac-

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comply what they could not, by secret conspiracy or violent assaults. "When they heard that I had builded the wall, and that there was no breach left therein, they sent unto me, saying, Come, let us meet together in some one of the villages in the plain of Ono. But they thought to do me mischief, and I sent messengers unto them, saying, I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down; why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you?" Five times they pressed their request for a friendly conference, and as often were refused. Finally we are told, when the wall was finished, their enemies ceased troubling them and were much cast down, "for they perceived that the work was wrought of God." Fidelity to principle and devoted service has its reward, while the enemies of Zion are humbled and vanquished. "Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee, and the remainder of his wrath shalt thou restrain."

We have then in this brief narrative, an epitome of the ordeal through which the Church of the living God has passed in every age. From the time when salvation was proposed for our guilty race on to the present, Satan and his emissaries in one form or another, have steadily and continuously developed their energies. As the Jews were laughed at and despised, so were the first preachers of the gospel, and so have been their followers. "What mean these feeble Jews," was the cry, when unlettered fishermen attempted to lay the foundations of Christianity, and convert the world by the foolishness of preaching. That cry is re-echoed in the present day, when the press and platform ridicule the weak attempts of the church to reform and regenerate society. And when sarcasm and laughter have failed, and the Christian world has held steadily on,

building the walls and repairing the breaches of Zion, then has the civil power been called upon, to crush the truth and destroy her life. We indeed live in days when the Church has no longer to contend against civil encroachments, but it has not always been so. In the days of the inquisition and the days preceding the Reformation, when Popery and Prelacy contended for domination, fearful havoc was made among God's saints. And now, when fire and faggot, the gibbet and the guillotine, have all been found unequal to the destruction of the church, she is fawned upon and flattered by the world, and covenants and compromises are sought after between God and Mammon. It is thus that the wall is built in troublous times.

The history of the church's progress amid diversified opposition, is just the history of the individual Christian. All through life it is a stand-up fight against principalities and powers—against evil within and evil without. It is true that

"Satan trembles when he sees
The weakest saint upon his knees,"

But he in nowise abandons effort. He strives to crush and stamp out the first emotions of holiness, and cool the first glow of love. He laughs at efforts to lead a consistent life—he creates strife in families, stirs up the malice of ungodly companions, and never ceases in his malignity until the work of grace in the heart is completed, and the saints' everlasting rest secured. It is thus that we must build the wall and cultivate holiness. It is thus we must agonize if we would overcome.

"Ne'er think the victory won,
Nor once at ease sit down;
Thy arduous work will not be done
Till thou hast got the crown."

The conduct of Nehemiah is worthy of imitation by all who would attain eminence in the Christian life, or serve the cause of truth. Be suspicious of every form of friendship that bids you suspend effort. There are many Sanballats at the present day. If Satan can get the believer to yield but once to his blandishments and seductions—to halt in his journey—to lay aside his spiritual weapons—to omit his religious duties—and leave off building the wall, it is enough for his purpose. He never asks a Christian *all at once*, to renounce the service of God and abandon his faith. He first insinuates—then ministers to his self-pride and vanity—then creates doubts, and criminales God's character, and step by step leads on to apostasy. The only antidote to all such suggestions is the language of Nehemiah: "I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down." If the work fills and fires the soul—if its transcendent importance is realized—if it absorbs and engrosses all the powers of the mind, temptations cannot harm. As the painter must have a genuine passion for his work—the eye and soul of a true artist—before he reaches eminence in his profession—so the Christian, in order to reach the highest possibilities of a sanctified life, must be entirely consecrated to his work.

The elements of success in secular callings are the same in religious matters. Every profession in life demands perseverance as a condition of eminence. Men who have no settled aim in life—no fixed principles—no earnest enthusiasm—who "are everything by turns and nothing long,"—are of no value to the world. They add nothing to its moral capital, and arrive at the close of existence with nothing but mournful regrets over wasted energies and unimproved privileges. On the other hand, diligence

and industry, with God's blessing, always command respect and secure an honorable independence. And so it is in the concentration of the higher and nobler faculties of the soul. The judgment of God is righteous, "who will render to every man according to his deeds ; To them who by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life.

The narrative also suggests the important thought that no great enterprise is completed without the co-operation and contributions of many hands. Says Nehemiah: "We returned all of us to the wall, *every one unto his work.*" It was so in the building of the first as well as the second temple. It is so in the upbuilding of the spiritual temple in men's hearts and in the world. One may receive the credit, and justly deserve it, as the master mind who organizes and conceives, but without assistance, inventive genius is practically useless. The draughtsman sketches the proportions of the ship, but her keel is laid, and her timbers joined, and her sails are spread by other hands. Watt invents the application of steam to mechanical and locomotive purposes—Stephenson and thousands of mechanics frame the iron monsters that rush with lightning speed through city and forest. So with the grandest specimens of modern architecture. The architect gives the plans and specifications, but the mason and the carpenter give tangibility and visibility to the outline. So on the battle-field. The general studies out the campaign, posts his sentinels and places his cannon ; but his subalterns and inferior officers, backed by brave soldiers, sweep the field and gain the victory.

It was on this principle that the walls of Jerusalem were built. Nehemiah was a brave man, but his bravery

did not alone accomplish what he proposed. He was enthusiastic, but his enthusiasm did not build the walls. Had the mass of his countrymen held back, they never would have been built, short of a miracle. But they cooperated with their leader and successfully restored Jerusalem to something of its former glory.

In the upbuilding of churches, these are still the essential elements of success.

There must be a leader. Much depends upon him. If timid, faint-hearted, unaggressive, there can be little or no progress. He must not only give the command to march, but go in front and point out the way. Let but the rank and file suspect cowardice, hesitation or indecision in the commander, and they are at once demoralized. And if the church suspects moral cowardice in the preacher, the people are smitten with spiritual paralysis.

But not only must there be a leader. There must be the constant and steady support of the people. The rank and file must close in. Confidence in the membership inspires the minister with courage. When he feels that his hands are upheld and his enterprises seconded, he can undergo immense labor. But indifference and supineness damp the energies and cool the fervor of the bravest soul. "Every one to his work," is the motto of an active church. The church is a place for consecrated labor, where every man and woman finds and fills their allotted place.

Finally, for the more retiring and diffident, there is also a sphere in the church of Christ. Said Carey, the celebrated missionary, "I'll go down to the pit, if you will hold the rope." The hands of Moses were upheld by

Aaron and Hur, during the battle with the Amalekites. By prayer and holy living great victories are achieved. So says the poet :

" Such let my life be here ;
Not marked by noise, but by success alone ;
Quiet and gentle, clear and fair as light ;
Yet full of its all-penetrating power,
Its silent but resistless influence :
Making no needless sound, yet ever working
Hour after hour, upon a needy world."

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SUDDEN DEATH.

“ Truly as the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, there is a step between me and death.” 1st Samuel 20, v 3.

David and Jonathan were fast friends. The love that existed between them was of the purest and most unselfish character. The feelings of King Saul towards David were of a very different nature. He hated him with an intensity of hatred that scrupled not to shed innocent blood. David had done the King no wrong. On the contrary, he had befriended his person, and on more than one occasion saved the honor of his kingdom. But regarding him as his rival—as one who was regarded by the mass of the people with no ordinary affection, and as one who was divinely set apart to be the future monarch,—Saul vainly attempted to thwart the purposes of heaven by accomplishing directly or indirectly his premature death. David aware of the King's jealousy and malicious intentions left the palace, and wandered hither and thither over the land, a poor outcast fugitive, friendless and homeless. From time to time meetings between Jonathan and David took place, when expressions of sympathy and attachment on the part of Jonathan cheered the heart of David, and when tidings

from the palace enabled him to seek some new hiding place, where for a time he might escape the vengeance of King Saul. An account of one of these meetings is contained in this chapter. David had fled from Naioth in Ramah to his friend Jonathan. Depressed in spirit and weary of this long continued fugitive life;—conscious of innocence as regards King Saul, he cries out in the language of mental agony, “What have I done? what is mine iniquity? and what is my sin before thy father that he seeketh my life?” Jonathan with that affection for his father which is most praiseworthy, and anxious to entertain the highest possible opinion of his conduct, in spite of the strange and tortuous course he had recently pursued, replied, “God forbid, thou shalt not die; behold my father will do nothing, either great or or small, but that he will show it me. And why should my father hide this thing from me? It is not so.” David however has a juster estimate of Saul, and knows the relentless bitter hatred that fills his mind. He will not grieve Jonathan by telling him in so many words that the death of his bosom friend is a fixed and certain event, but adds:—“Truly as the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, there is a step between me and death.” In other words, “I know not where to turn or whither to flee, but Saul is on my track. The next step I take may bring me into his presence and seal my doom.”

Every sudden death of a fellow mortal verifies the truth of David's words, that there is but a step between us and death. A few inches this way or that way, in the very exuberance of health and strength, may be sudden entrance upon eternity and judgment.

“Great God, on what a slender thread
Hang everlasting things!
The eternal states of all the dead
Upon life's feeble strings!”

The truth of the statement will appear by a few cursory observations.

I. Taking human life at its longest possible duration, there is after all but a step between us and death. From the cradle to the grave—from helpless infancy to feeble old age, is nothing but a step. Looking forward twenty or thirty years, existence seems long in the eyes of childhood. But as we gradually pass on stage after stage in the journey, until arriving at the summit we begin with tottering foot-steps to descend the hill,—Oh ! how brief and shadowy are four score years. It would be the same, did we live like the Antedelvians, nine hundred instead of ninety years ; we would still say with the patriarch Jacob, “ the days of our life are few and evil.”

This brevity of existence is an oft recurring subject on the page of inspiration. To impress us with the solemn fact and prepare us for the sudden close of our life on earth, the entire world of nature is traversed and made use of. Like a span length, swift as the weaver’s shuttle, or the eagle hasting to its prey ;—like the lightning flash or the rushing torrent ; brief and unsubstantial as the shadows on the sun dial ; as the vapour or the passing clouds of heaven ; as the dew drop that melts before the first beams of the rising sun ; as the fading flowers and the withering grass—such is the life of man upon the earth ! Illustration upon illustration,—declaration after declaration, call attention to this truth, that nothing is so brief and so uncertain as man’s stay in the present world.

Our own experience, be it shorter or longer, corroborates the teachings of scripture. It seems but as yesterday, says the old grey haired man, since I played with the companions

of my youth, and took part in memorable scenes and incidents, that long since have become matters of forgotten history. It is only when we mark the growth of our children, or when they go out from our homes and take their places by their own firesides, or when standing over the graves of old friends who were our contemporaries in early years, that we realize how far we have advanced, and how near we are approaching the eternal world. Grey hairs are upon our heads and we know it not. We have been so busily engaged with the duties of the present; life has perchance flowed on apace so smoothly,—that we scarce can realize that the haven of rest is so near at hand, and the hour of death so close upon us.

Is it a sad thought that life is so brief and that there is but a step between us and death? It should not be so. Beyond a certain age, unless in peculiarly strong and vigorous constitutions, life becomes a burden. We feel that it is better to depart and be with Christ. We groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven—not that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life. We say with Job—"I would not live always." When the evil days come,—when all pleasures and carnal delights fail to satisfy the soul,—when the keepers of the house tremble and the strong men bow themselves and the grinders cease, and those that look out at the windows are darkened; when the grass-hopper becomes a burden and the almond tree flourishes and desire fails—then like the Psalmist we say, "Oh that I had wings like a dove; for then would I fly away and be at rest. I would hasten my escape from the windy storm and tempest."

II. If we consider the sudden and mortal diseases of which man is the subject, we feel that there is but a step between us and death.

The step is very short in some cases;—they die, ere they begin to live. In many instances however, some secret mysterious disease, long lingering in the system unknown to the man himself, and beyond the reach of medical skill, terminates existence in a moment, and brings the strong man low.

Medical science has indeed reached a high position in civilized communities, but cannot in ten thousand instances avert death, nor explain save in very general terms the cause. There are antidotes for the more common diseases of our race, and alleviations and remedies for pain and suffering, but in how many cases does life cease to exist before the physician can be called? Apoplexy, paralysis, heart-disease, coming unexpectedly and with overpowering violence, finish their work in a moment, and end the busiest life. "Died by the visitation of God"—"found dead by unknown causes," is the frequently recurring verdict when human skill and inquest are utterly perplexed as to the secondary cause of death. So many and such sudden calls is surely sufficient evidence of the truth of our text, that "there is but a step between us and death."

If men were assured of living to a certain age, and if strength of body and vigor of mind were sure indications of the fact, we would not wonder so much at the indifference and frivolity which characterize the great mass of men regarding their latter end. But it is far otherwise. We may begin the day in our usual or perhaps better than our usual health, and long before its end be stretched in death.

In the midst of engrossing cares and business avocations, and while sketching out plans and enterprises for the future without a moment's warning the curtain drops, and the eye closes upon the world. Men know this and admit it, yet practically deny it. Day after day they follow to the grave robust men, who to all human appearance were far from their end, but beyond a momentary sigh and shudder, no abiding impression is left upon the heart and conscience. They "think all men mortal but themselves;" they do not wonder that the poor consumptive patient, who for years has been confined to a bed of languishing, without any possible hope of recovery, should be thoughtful and concerned about the eternal world, but as for them, it were worse than folly and affectation to reflect upon their mortality, or anticipate the invisible world.

In recent times a most dangerous theory has been ventilated, in regard to those sudden diseases that cut down so many strong men in the prime of life; a theory all the more dangerous, inasmuch as it contains a certain measure of truth. On the sudden death of *men eminent in Science or Literature*, we are told that overmuch brain-work has been the superinducing cause; that they attempted too much and exhausted the finer fibres of their constitution, and thus hastened their untimely deaths. Now it is all too true, that excess in physical and mental toil, must wear out rapidly the strongest frames; but it is equally true, that the greatest possible care of our constitutions, cannot lengthen life one hour beyond the fiat and decree of heaven. It is good to warn men against over-indulgence in anything of an injurious character, but we must beware of teaching them, that they have the contingencies of life under their own control. The most regular, temperate and virtuous men in society are often suddenly called

away and no solution can be given but a simple reference to the will of God.

III. If we consider the unforeseen and mysterious casualties which so frequently terminate existence, apart altogether from disease and sickness, we must admit the literal truth of the words, that "there is but a step between us and death."

If I remind you of recent sudden deaths, I shall perhaps make a deeper impression than if I merely dogmatized and discoursed upon the subject. A wealthy merchant of New York is visiting the Isle of Wight in England—one evening in parting with a friend, he makes for what he imagines is the balcony of the hotel—steps out, and is dashed to pieces in a moment on the pavement below. An engineer of a Cunard ocean steamer, brings his vessel safely into port, and anxious to meet his family with all possible speed, instead of walking across the gangway to the wharf, leaps from the vessel to the dock—strikes against the pier—fractures the brain and in a few days is no more. A Free Church minister in Scotland a few weeks ago, enters the pulpit seemingly in the full enjoyment of health—gives out his text, and with more than his usual earnestness and power rivets the attention of his congregation, when suddenly, the head drops upon the Bible, and the voice dies away, and ere help is given to sustain the falling body, the soul has fled to the bar of God. And coming nearer home,—two young maidens in the overflowing mirthfulness of their nature, step together hand in hand into the treacherous river, and in a few seconds sink to rise no more, until death has stamped his seal upon their brow. "Lovely and pleasant in their lives, and in their death not divided." Mysterious providences these doubtless are, but part of his ways

who doth all things well. We are staggered and oppressed
by the darkness and say with the Poet :—

“ Either disperse these mists, which blot and fill
My perspective still as they pass ;
Or else remove me home unto that hill
Where I shall need no glass.

To the good called away early or late in life, sudden
death has no terrors ;—nay for many reasons is desirable.

“ Merciful the haste
That baffles sickness—Thou was not made to taste
Death’s bitterness,
Declines slow—wasting charm, or fever’s fierce distress,
Death came unheralded :—but it was well ;
For so thy Saviour bore
Kind witness, thou wast meet at once to dwell
On his eternal shore ;
All warning spared,
For none he gives where hearts are for prompt
change prepared.”

If we are always ready what matters it when the summons comes ? When Sir Colin Campbell was asked by the British Government how soon he could leave England for the theatre of war in India, he answered *to-morrow*. And when William Burns, the Chinese Missionary of sainted memory, was asked by the English Presbyterian Synod to go forth as the pioneer apostle to do a grander work than ever warriors on the battle field accomplished, his response was of a similar nature. And so, when our marching orders come, let us be prepared. We may not be able to give parting counsels to those we love, or imprint the farewell kiss of affection upon the cheek ; we may know but little of what the poet calls :

“ The pain and bliss of dying ” ;—

the eye may be closed to all around for hours before the

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soul is introduced to the eternal world, but the want of such dying experiences, will be more than compensated by the sudden and transcendent glory that shall encircle and possess the emancipated spirit.

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In view of such sudden calls, do I need to urge the young and careless to consider their latter end. We do not ask you to prepare to die, but rather to begin to live. It is criminal to fritter away existence in easy unconcern and reckless indifference to the claims of God and our fellow men. This present moment may be the turning point of existence—on which hangs your eternal destiny. It is thus of more importance than the endless ages of eternity. The seeds now sown determine the moral harvest—the actions of the present color the transactions of the judgment day. As the acorn contains the oak in germ, so the life that now is, contains the possibilities of the future, including our immortality.

We can easily conjecture how a man will die if we know his conduct while he lives. We need no dying testimony, —no deathbed experience to assure us that all is well and shall be well with the child of God. The life hid with Christ for years cannot be lost; the soul united to Jesus can never perish. But concerning those who have never sought or found peace in believing, we can have but small hope indeed. The repentance of such deathbeds must be very pronounced and decided, to make us satisfied that the soul is safe. Do not O! sinner risk your salvation on such a hope. There is but a step between you and death—nay there is reason to fear that in the midst of your sins and in the act of rebellion, you may be cut down,—blasted and blighted for ever, like the tree suddenly stripped of its leaves, by the flying thunderbolt.

To those who are really Christ's people, the prospect of a speedy termination to life's labors, should prompt to renewed diligence and fidelity. The end of life should ever be kept in view. Recognizing its brevity and the little we can accomplish, with every moment occupied and every faculty and power strung to their highest tension, indolence and indifference should give place to ceaseless activity. "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with all thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave whither thou goest." Do not merely plan and purpose great things, but act. Good intentions and pious resolutions are not enough. You must rear the edifice and construct the vessel, after the plans are drawn and the outline drafted. There are some men in professional life, possessed of vast intellects and large ideas, who are totally incapable of practical action, and are never recognized as benefactors of their race. The world is nothing the better for their abstract speculations and profound reasonings. Men of far inferior mind, but with greater practical wisdom, accomplish much more and leave behind them sacred memories. And in the Church of Christ, how many there are, who spend precious hours in fanciful theories about the regeneration and elevation of humanity, instead of endeavouring to convince men of sin, and accept of pardon through a Saviour's blood. Not so, should those conduct themselves, who realize that there is but a step between them and death. Our action must be instant. We must avail ourselves of the first opportunity presented us of doing good. To-morrow it may be too late. If God's work is binding upon us at all, it demands our whole attention and our noblest energies. "Blessed is that servant, whom his lord, when he cometh shall find

doing. Watch therefore; for ye know not what hour your Lord will come."

"It may be in the evening,
When the work of the day is done,
And you have time to sit in the twilight
And watch the sinking sun ;

It may be when the midnight
Is heavy upon the land,
And the black waves lying dumbly
Along the sand ;

It may be at the cock-crow,
When the night is dying slowly
In the sky,
And the sea looks calm and holy,
Waiting for the dawn,
Of the golden sun,
Which draweth nigh.

It may be in the morning,
When the sun is bright and strong,
And the dew is glittering sharply
Over the little lawn.

So I am watching quietly
Every day.
For I know he is coming shortly
To summon me.
And when a shadow falls across the window
Of my room,
Where I am working my appointed task,
I lift my head to watch the door, and ask
If he is come ;
And the Angel answers sweetly,
In my home—
Only a few more shadows
And he will come."

The best preparation for sudden death is earnest, consecrated effort in the cause of God. Doing each day's work in its allotted time, we can never be taken by surprise, let death come when it may. To sigh and mourn over the fact of death's uncertainty, and engage in a sickly sentimentalism that originates nothing of value to our fellow-men is foolish. Forgetting those things which are behind,

let us reach forth unto those things which are before. "It is high time to awake out of sleep. The night is far spent, the day is at hand." There is no one, however obscure, but can accomplish something for God, and leave the world better than he found it. In our own estimation existence may be brief and unsatisfactory, but not so in the judgment of Him, who regards the humblest effort with favor, and recompences far above our deserts. Working from day to day under His inspection, and following the leadings of His providence, life cannot be unfruitful. Accepting our place and directing our energies towards the advancement of His glory, we shall not fear the summons to depart. Like Paul, while conscious of many shortcomings and imperfections, we may be enabled to say—"I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith; Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing."

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THE POWER OF TRUE LOVE.

"And Jacob served seven years for Rachel: and they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her."—Genesis 29, v. 20.

In these words we have set before us, the wonderful power of natural affection in overcoming obstacles that lie in its pathway, and in developing patient endurance under grievous wrong. The history of Jacob from first to last, is strangely diversified with light and shade, although the latter preponderates. Not without good reason when near the close of life he says; "the days of the years of my pilgrimage are an hundred and thirty years; few and evil have the days of the years of my life been and have not attained unto the days of the years of the life of my fathers, in the days of their pilgrimage." Much of the sadness which Jacob felt, doubtless arose from the memory of actions unjustifiable in the sight of God or man. One wrong step taken early in his career, seems to have colored the whole of his life. It is no excuse to say, that God designed the birthright for Jacob and not Esau,

and that his mother's cunning was but carrying out the will of heaven. What God determines shall happen in our history, he can and will bring to pass, without the aid of dishonest means;—such as were employed to defraud Esau of the birthright and bestow it upon Jacob. Nor can we palliate Jacob's share in the transaction, at the expense of Rebekah. It is very evident, how exceedingly ready he was to help in accomplishing the fraud. He interposed no remonstrances whatever when the plan was proposed, and adopting the maxim that "the end justified the means," most adroitly played his part in the dishonorable act. Jacob was no mere child, when standing in the presence of his aged father, he said—"I am Esau thy first-born: I have done as thou badest me, arise I pray thee, sit and eat of my venison, that thy soul may bless me." He knew well the deliberate character of the falsehood he was uttering;—a falsehood not the less sinful, that it had been put into his lips by a fond mother, who imagined nothing could be wrong, that looked towards the advancement of her son.

The consequences of this fraud, are plainly enough seen in Jacob's subsequent life, and have an important bearing upon the text. Esau justly, though unduly enraged, determines to take away his brother's life, and but for his hasty departure, the threat would doubtless have been put in execution. Rebekah ever watchful over the safety of her son makes known to him his danger, and insists upon his flight. "Now therefore, my son, obey my voice, and arise flee to Laban my brother to Haran, and tarry with him a few days, until thy brother's fury turn away." There seems to have been a twofold purpose in thus sending Jacob away—to be out of reach of his revengeful bro-

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ther, and that in due time he might marry one of Laban's daughters. In reference to this last named object, both parents were at one. "Go to Padanaram, says Isaac, to the house of Bethuel thy mother's father, and take thee a wife from thence of the daughters of Laban thy mother's brother." Thus blessed and counselled;—a fugitive—a wanderer—an inexperienced adventurer in the world, Jacob hurries forth from Beersheba to Haran, a distance of five hundred miles. He has no servant to attend him—no heavily laden camels follow with ample supplies for the journey—no beast to carry him—no companion to beguile the weary hours with pleasant converse, and soothe his agitated spirit;—with nothing but a staff to lean upon, he pursues his lonely march. At the close of the first day's journey, the sun being set, he lights upon a certain place and tarries for the night. Taking the stones of the wayside for his pillow, he lies down to sleep. What his thoughts were in that hour, it is not difficult to conceive. Conscience doubtless accused him of past wrong-doing, and whispered threats of certain punishment. But God was merciful to the homeless wanderer above his deserts. As he sleeps, he gives him through the agency of a striking dream, fresh assurance of divine protection. "Behold, a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven; and, behold, the Angels of God ascending and descending on it." Better than all, Jehovah himself stood above it, and said, "I am the Lord God of Abraham, thy father, and the God of Isaac; the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed; and thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south: and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed." "And behold,

I am with thee and will keep thee in all places whether thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land: for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of."

"What though earth were his only bed?
And rough stones pillow'd up his head?
His God was there;—and visions bright
Shed glory on the gloom of night.

Jehovah stood above; and blest
The Patriarch as he lay at rest,
Reveal'd his name; and to the end
Promised his presence should befriend."

The vision was most seasonable, and had a blessed effect upon Jacob's mind. He awoke deeply solemnized and gladdened, under a sense of God's presence with him during the unconscious hours of slumber." "Waking from his sweet repose—he retraced the dream that calmed his woes," and taking the stone that had served for his pillow, consecrates it with oil, and sets it up as a memorial of this remarkable event. To him the place was indeed dreadful—the house of God—the gate of heaven! Its memory followed him through all his subsequent journeyings and sustained him under severe afflictions.

Having vowed to be the Lord's forever, Jacob takes his staff in hand and proceeds towards Padanaram. His mental depression is now gone. "He went on his journey—" or as it may be read, "he lifted up" —" indicating cheerfulness of temperance and energy of soul. Nothing further is recorded of his journey until he reaches Haran. As he draws near, his attention is called to a well in a field, around which three flocks of sheep are lying, ready to be watered. The shepherds coming near, roll away the stone from the mouth of the well, and having

watered their flocks, put the stone again upon the well's mouth. "My brethren whence be ye, asks Jacob of the shepherds? Of Haran are we, is their reply. Know ye Laban the son of Nahor? We know him. Is he well? He is well; and behold, Rachel his daughter cometh with the sheep."

As Jacob continues his conversation with the shepherds Rachel approaches. The sight of the daughter of his mother's brother, awakens strong emotions in his bosom. Not without some important meaning, does the inspired penman describe her, 'as the daughter of his mother's brother,' and the flock as "the flock of his mother's brother," and the sheep, as "the sheep of his mother's brother." Jacob's mother was all in all to him, beyond any other earthly kindred. The sight of Rachel called up many touching emotions in his bosom. Possibly "he pictured to himself, that just as that maiden appeared before him, so had his mother appeared in that very place, before Abraham's servant many years before, and that now he was among the scenes of her youth, of which she had often spoken to him." With such feelings, we can easily understand, how that when he kissed his fair cousin, he lifted up his voice and wept. Far away from the home of the youth;—no longer—*perhaps never again* to be the fond idol of a mother's affection, his heart overflowed with intense emotion. His words trembled upon his lips, and his eyes filled with tears, as he looked upon one, that recalled to his mind, the features of his mother, who was dearer to him than life itself.

When Rachel has recovered from her glad surprise, she runs to acquaint her father, of the arrival of his sister's

son. Laban hurries forth to meet him, and having embraced him and kissed him, brings him to his home. "Surely, he says, thou art my bone and my flesh ;—" intimating that for the sake of his sister Rebekah, Jacob should receive more than the usual hospitality of Oriental Chiefs. He would treat him not as a stranger but as a son, and bestow upon him the most disinterested and purest affection of his nature.

Time passes on, and with no prospect of returning home, Jacob enters into an arrangement with Laban for future service. He had doubtless before this, assisted in the labors of the flock and field, without looking for any reward, and in return for the cordial welcome he had received. But in money matters, it is well that the best of friends should have a clear understanding, and should square accounts from time to time, as much as if they were strangers. So thought Laban. And had his subsequent conduct, not revealed the man in another and truer light, we should have commended him for his honorable proposal. "Because thou art my brother, shouldest thou serve me for nought. Tell me what thy wages shall be?"

And now comes the opportune moment, for Jacob to declare his love for Rachel. He could make no offer of dowry, as was common in the east, in order to secure his wife, but pledges his service for seven years, in order that at the end of this period, he may call the woman he so tenderly and purely loves, his own. "I will serve thee seven years for Rachel thy younger daughter." Such a custom seems strange in our day and land. But not so in oriental countries, where the father invariably expects the expectant

husband to make some compensation for his wife. And in cases like the present, where a young man has no other means of acknowledging the value he puts upon his bride, seven or eight years of servitude, is regarded as only right and proper.

While we cannot but admire the spontaneous offer made by Jacob, we cannot but detest the selfishness of Laban. At their first meeting, he exhibited a large amount of what seemed genuine affection, but on every subsequent occasion, he proved himself to be a grasping, unscrupulous, and worldly-minded man. His own interests were of far more importance, than the welfare of Jacob or the happiness of his child. Jacob had no tangible consideration to offer, and so he makes the next best bargain, and instead of at once declining the proposal of his kinsman, Laban takes Jacob at his word. "It is better that I give her to thee, than that I should give her to another man. Abide with me."

Nor is Jacob free from censure in this matter. Poor though he was, he had no need to obtain a wife after such a fashion, or demean himself before such a man as Laban. As a man Jacob was vastly the superior of his Uncle, and as the heir of promise, and one who had so recently been the recipient of such gracious tokens of heaven's regard, immeasurably above him. It is not social position, that makes a man truly great and noble, but intelligence—virtue, and unswerving fidelity to principle. To put himself in the power of Laban, and gain his daughter by seven years of servitude, was altogether wrong on the part of Jacob. As the son of Isaac, he should have urged his suit in manly terms, without stooping as a mendicant

wanderer, to supplicate the favor of his uncle. "As the heaven destined and heaven declared inheritor of the covenant birthright, he should boldly have proclaimed the errand on which he came, and asked at once the spouse of his choice, with as simple a trust in God, as that which Abraham manifested, when he sought a partner for his son."

But however much we may blame him for the method adopted to secure Rachel for his wife, we cannot speak too highly of the cheerfulness and fidelity with which he fulfilled his pledge. "Jacob served seven years for Rachel: and they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her." It must have been strong love that maintained such patient waiting. His pure affection for Rachel, was however more than sufficient for all the demands made upon his temper, and the physical toil that he endured. At first sight, it would seem, as if the very intensity of his love, would make the seven years seem long, rather than the few days they seemed;—that hope so long deferred would make the heart sick. In cases where there is no formidable hindrance to a union "love becomes impatient of delay," but when great difficulties interpose, it stimulates to a patient and resolute course of action to surmount them. In proportion as an object is valued, labour is put forth to attain it. With Jacob the time seemed brief and the service pleasant, because the object of his affections was so highly valued.

Jacob's love for Rachel if rapid in its growth, and ardent in its manifestations, was far from being evanescent. It was genuine;—as pure and fervent at her death, as at the beginning of their intimacy. No one can read the ac-

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count of her sudden death, without deep sympathy with the stricken Patriarch. She dies in childbirth on the journey between Bethel and Ephrath. As her soul departs, she gives to her child the name of "Benoni,"—son of my sorrow,—“intimating that the agonies of the dying mother, had secured a living child. But Jacob will have nothing of the nature of sorrow connected with the memory of his beloved Rachel. In her presence, life to him was perpetual sunshine, and the grave must not shroud in gloom the last moments of the departing saint. “*Son of my right hand*” of my strength, *not* son of my sorrow, shall Rachel’s child be called. And how tenderly he cherished her memory I need not tell you! He set a pillar upon her grave, but a lonely heart was the best remembrancer of his beloved wife. And when the old Patriarch is himself drawing near his end, Rachel’s memory is still green and fragrant. You remember his last interview with his son Joseph, who has hurried to his bedside, taking with him his two sons Ephraim and Manasseh, that they may receive his dying benediction. As he engages in the solemn act, his thoughts go back to the past, and the image of Joseph’s mother, the beloved Rachel is again before him. “The old man’s heart is full. Something in Joseph’s look—some trace or lineament of his mothers pale fair face, as he last saw her travailing and expiring,—brings back the sad scene, to the Patriarchs dim eye. Simply, as if almost unconsciously, he gives utterance to his recollection. “As for me, when I came from Padan-aram, Rachel died by me in the land of Canaan, in the way, when yet there was but a little way to come unto Ephrath: and I buried her there in the way of Ephrath.” And thus he passed away, awaiting the dawning of the

resurrection morn, "when the hand divine should gather the sacred dust, and rebuild for immortality its broken walls."

It is not however to expatiate on the power of mere natural affection, that I have chosen the text, but to speak to you of a nobler and more enduring love, which every believer should possess towards the Lord Jesus Christ. If mere natural affection prompts to such sacrifices—developes such a power of endurance and such a strength of will in overcoming obstacles, what should Divine love do, when once it takes possession of the soul? "Many waters cannot quench love, says the Bride in the song, neither can the floods drown it. If a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would utterly be contemned." Nothing can quench divine love. Afflictions, crosses, long periods of separation and even desertion, cannot change the believers feelings towards his Saviour. "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Nay in all these things we are more than conquerors, through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Taking the case of Jacob, in order to illustrate the power of divine love within the soul I remark :

I.—*That love lightens and lessens labor.* Jacob's duties in the house of Laban were no sinecure. Late and early—under all circumstances and conditions he was actively

employed. We do not read that he was favoured in any way because he was Laban's nephew, and the accepted husband of his daughter, nor that he was assigned any higher place than the other shepherds, or exempted from common toil. Jacob was not the man to accept such a favor, or shrink from a manly fulfillment of the contract. What in other circumstances would have been unbearable and irksome, he accepts contentedly and cheerfully. It is not so much for Laban that he is working, as for Laban's daughter. The object in view dignifies his calling, and raises it far above ordinary handiwork. The price that is demanded for Rachel is perhaps unreasonable in the circumstances, but not more than she is worth, and therefore with hearty good will he accepts his lot. His conduct will prove to Laban, that his affection is sincere, and to Rachel it will be a pledge of pure and constant love, in the after years of married life.

In proportion then as we really love Christ, our labor in his service will be materially lightened and lessened. We shall think nothing of sacrifice and self-denial—we shall make no complaint of weariness and exhaustion—we shall never weary in well doing—we shall engage in the humblest callings, if thereby we may promote the interests of Christ's Kingdom upon earth, and prove our attachment to his person. If the heart is right, nothing is impossible for us. It is such a spirit, that has enabled so many eminently great and good men to leave all that was dear to them on earth, and wear out life in winning souls to Christ. Said the sainted Henry Martyn, when about to give himself to Missionary work,—“the soul that has experienced the love of God, will not stay meanly enquiring how much he shall do, and thus limit his service, but will

be earnestly seeking more and more, to know the will of our Heavenly Father, that he may be enabled to do it." Nor was a Missionary life, naturally attractive to such a scholar. "The thought he adds, that I must be unceasingly employed amongst poor and ignorant people, is what my proud spirit revolts at. To be obliged to submit to a thousand uncomfortable things, that must happen to me, is what the flesh cannot endure. How it will be when the trial comes, I know not, yet I will trust and not be afraid." John Macdonald the devoted London Minister, in resigning his charge for Mission work in Calcutta, says "If any chain forged on earth could bind me, the memorial of my attached people might, but I feel, that contrary to my own weak nature, all ties are made as flax to me. I am not yours my beloved brethren and flock, neither am I my own. His I am, and must be; therefore I go." Says George Whitfield,—“When the Bishop laid his hand upon me, I gave myself up, to be a Martyr for him, who hung upon the cross for me. Till you hear of my dying for, or in my work, you will not be apprised of all the preferment that is expected by me.” And said the fervent, holy-minded Payson, “Oh, what a master do I serve. Never was preaching such sweet work. Never did heaven appear so near, so sweet, so overwhelmingly glorious. God’s promises appear so strong, so real, more solid than the everlasting hills.” With such love to Christ, labor is a pleasure. The love of Christ, constrains us to exercise every talent, and embrace every opportunity, that souls may be saved and the world evangelized.

II.—*Love shortens labor.* The seven years that Jacob served, seemed to him but a brief period, for the love he bore to Rachel. Seven years is a long period in prospect

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—long in actual experience, when trials and afflictions abound, and much has to be encountered, trying to flesh and blood. Jacob's seven years of service were neither better nor worse, than what falls to the lot of suffering humanity from day to day, but with all their troubles and annoyances they passed quickly away. So it is in the pursuit of any honorable calling. Let the mind be usefully employed and there is no place for uneasiness or complaint. When our occupation is congenial, or rendered so by other considerations, time passes quickly. Love is the motive power to every form of noble service. It transforms drudgery into easy and delightful labor, and raises humble actions to an equality with the angelic.

It is thus that we understand, how the christian is able to bear, the afflictive dispensations of the present life. Paul explains it when he says, "Our light affliction which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." The Psalmist says, "weeping may endure for a night, joy cometh in the morning." What is life at the longest compared with eternity? What are the few trials and hardships we now endure, in contrast with the endless pleasures, which are at God's right hand? "I reckon says the Apostle, that the sufferings of the present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us."

It is sad to hear professing christians complain of weariness in God's service. Nothing makes religion so repulsive and distasteful, as when God's people are heard speaking of the pain of cross-bearing and the heavy burdens and exactions of the Kingdom. If a man really loves the master, his whole temperament will be courageous, joyous, and hopeful. He may have his cares in larger

proportion than falls to the lot of most men, but he will not brood over them or magnify them. No man can serve a kinder or more considerate master than him who said, "My yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

III.—Love recompenses labor. Do you think that Jacob estimated the seven years service too much, when he stood side by side with Rachel as his bride? Far from it. For such a one, he was willing to work twice seven years, and actually did so. And shall any saint in heaven, when he enters upon its blessedness, conclude that he has done too much for Christ?—that the reward is not proportionate to his pains—that the reality falls short of what he imagined while in the body? No, it cannot be! "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." If regret is at all possible, it will arise from an humbling sense of our poor unworthy efforts, and not that the recompense is beneath our highest expectations. If to us the words of welcome are addressed, "Come ye blessed of my father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world," our feelings will prompt us to ask—why such honor? what have we accomplished to merit such exalted favor? can it be that we are considered worthy of a place at God's right hand? Yet, so it is. "Verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me."

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A GOOD NAME.

"A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favor rather than silver and gold,"—Proverbs, 22, v, 1.

In Solomon's day and in more recent times, the saying was generally accepted as eminently wise and statesmanlike. It is not so now, we venture to say,—judged by the conduct of many in our different communities. In the whirl of business and the excitement of mercantile competition, men have not the time to study principles, and practice the highest forms of virtue! Utility, expediency and material success, are the rules which guide the mass of mankind. Promise ten thousand dollars to each of a hundred men, obtainable by a little sacrifice of character and honor, and how many would prefer the possession of a good conscience to the golden bribe? Does not public opinion at the present day teach, that wealth is a substitute for a good name, and provided a man has riches to counterbalance his wickedness, he need not be over-scru-

pulous as to his conduct? Is there not an impression abroad "that a man may barter his moral qualities for a certain external and civil success, and be the better for it; that while it may be all very well for a man who does not succeed in life to have a spotless name, there is an adulterated morality which is better than genuine, as gold adulterated is better than gold in its pure state." It is a bad business men think to be bankrupt both in purse and character, but not so very alarming, if there is gold to cover a multitude of sins.

It is such teaching that is sapping the foundations of public morality and lowering the standard of rectitude and honesty between man and man. Young men beginning public life take notice that dishonesty is no hindrance to public position, provided riches are acquired—nay, that a little smartness in over-reaching is accounted a positive talent in mercantile life, and a sure evidence of financial skill. A man who is content to make simply a living in the exercise of manly, straightforward conduct, but who might just as easily make a fortune by a little manœuvering, is accounted a very commonplace character, while a man who fails in business without abstracting from his creditors sufficient to help him for years, is esteemed a perfect fool. He receives no praise for his conscientious probity, and becomes an object of ridicule from the smarter and shrewder of his class. It is not wonderful in view of all this, that many young men should swerve from the straight line of integrity, and become idolators of mammon. Unless where there is strong religious principle, nothing else need be expected.

It is not difficult, I think, to show, that after all Solomon was right when he said, "a good name is rather to

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be chosen then great riches." The morality, and political economy enjoined upon the Jews, is admirably adapted to the present. In many things we have advanced since Old Testament times. Steam and electricity and the printing press have changed to a great extent the character of civilized society. Commerce and merchandize are conducted on very different methods. But the fundamental axioms of public morality and political creeds, have not changed in one iota. Back of all modern systems of social morality and political creeds, there stands out the sentiment of Solomon, defying contradiction and demanding the assent of all intelligent men. Riches are not so valuable as men imagine. It is better to be honored and beloved by good men, and go down to the grave mourned and lamented, than to be possessed of treasures of silver and gold.

What is a good name? Not the names of parents, although there are names, which in themselves, are passports to the highest places, and the most honorable regard. Men who have patriotically and unselfishly served the State, hand over to their children, the best of all legacies in their fragrant memory, To be the son of such a good and great man is in itself a valuable possession. But without individual force and purity of character, the name of one's parents in the long run goes for little. A good name is a good character,—the man himself is the aggregate of his actions. It is by the name that we individualize character. The name calls up before the mind, not the outward appearance of the man, so much as the character of his mind and his public actions. One man's name is the symbol for all that is good and amiable—another for all that is bad and repulsive. One

carries with it generosity, magnanimity, sterling honesty ; another, meanness, cowardice, and ingrained selfishness. One is the exponent of all that is despicable, degrading and contemptible ; another, of all that is manly, noble and loveable. Names thus make indelible impressions. They telegraph to the eye of the mind with the rapidity of lightning the whole deportment and bearing of our fellow men. We may often be mistaken in our judgements ; our opinions may be faulty ; but rightly or wrongly the man's name calls up the impression that his life has produced upon us.

A good name then is a name that awakens instinctively within the soul the highest feelings of reverence and admiration ; which stimulates to higher resolutions, to a loftier enthusiasm than do the common mass of mankind ; a name which acts as a talisman in beckoning the soul, to the accomplishment of grand and glorious enterprises for the good of humanity. Around such names and characters there are clustered the most thrilling memories. They are the real forces that move the world and mould society ; that keep it from intellectual and moral stagnation, by exhibiting what a virtuous humanity may attain when guided by inflexible principle and assisted by divine grace. Such a name is rather to be chosen than great riches.

It becomes a most important question then, to all who are starting in life, how shall I honestly secure such a reputation while living, and leave behind a fragrant memory when dead ? Character is not the product of a moment, and it is very much in a man's own hand what his character and reputation shall be. Good men may be slandered ; and the world in its judgment often errs and persecutes

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those who are deserving of the highest honors. But no really good man is ever entirely unappreciated or maligned. The true estimate of his worth and merit may be late in coming. Not until his grave is green, may his name be vindicated and his character stand out pure and lustrous before the gaze of men. But what he fails to enjoy himself, his children will inherit, and bless the name that gave them such honor among men. The consciousness of inward integrity in all our actions is of itself more than sufficient recompense, apart from present reward.

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But in addition to this inward testimony to the purity of our motives, such a character has a right to expect the good will and esteem of the world. A good conscience is indeed far better than a good reputation, and whether we secure the latter or not, we must never fail to preserve the former. But while not seeking honor from our fellow men, we are by no means to despise their good will. Honor, like a shadow, can never satisfy the soul, "but shadow though it be, it is precious as an accompaniment of the substance. As a substitute for a good conscience, a good name is a secret torment at the time,, and in the end a cheat ; but as a graceful outer garment with which a good conscience is clothed, it should be highly valued and carefully preserved. The atmosphere of a good name surrounding it, imparts to real worth additional body and breadth." The elements that go to constitute a good name are within the reach of all. To procure a good name among men, it is necessary first of all that character should have a good foundation. From the moment of one's entrance upon public life, there should be a fixed determination to touch nothing that is suspicious in morals—dishonest in word or action. or ignoble and debasing. A bad foundation seriously depreciates a very costly and

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handsome house, and a little leak or flaw in character, makes the whole fabric more or less susceptible of injury. Then, in addition, to a good foundation, the materials that form the edifice must be of the best quality, otherwise the foundation will but mock the building. Houses are often built of plastered wall instead of granite. For a few years they look well, but the winter's frost and storm, incessantly disintegrating and beating upon the composite fabric, and the intense heat of the summer's sun, soon render them an unsightly mass of cracks and fissures. So characters built of poor materials, of expediency, pretence, hypocrisy and sham, only serve for a time. What is real can easily be separated from what is counterfeit—what is true will stand—what is false will perish. A good name is a name that has stood the test of public and private scrutiny for years; not one that suddenly becomes conspicuous by some isolated act of generosity, but that has come through the severest of ordeals, and still retains its integrity, unmoved by calumny, unseduced by flattery, and victorious over temptation. A man who has thus been enabled to make proof of his rectitude for a long period of years, during which one after another of his compeers have been swept away by the cupidity and covetousness of the age, occupies a place second only to the angels—nay, in some respects superior to such exalted intelligences, who have never had to wrestle with the carnal and material lusts that are inseparable from humanity.

My hearer will probably say, well—a good name is a good thing—but is it after all better than riches? Can a man not possess both? He may, but not often. Just as the incoming tide, in times of freshets, overflows and submerges strips of land and islands hitherto uncovered, so, great accumulations of wealth blot out the finest and

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fairest traits of character. For one bold, brave swimmer who breasts the flood and leaps aloft with the rising wave, a hundred perish. A compromise is hardly to be thought of. Great riches may be yours, but if the alternative is offered, choose the good name, whatever be the sacrifice.

Let us glance briefly at certain considerations that should prompt to its possession :

I. The qualities that ensure a good name are a constant source of happiness to the man himself. The highest kind of human enjoyment comes from within. If the mind is agitated or uneasy—if fear and torment are its constant inmates—then all the splendors of Royalty are unequal to the task of producing happiness. The soul of man, even in its fallen condition, is cognizable of what is true and noble, and any deviation from the law of rectitude inflicts a certain amount of pain and annoyance. This is of course only true where the conscience is not dead to all impressions. A man who is constantly violating the laws of morality and evading the claims of justice, carries about with him an incipient pandemonium. No one but the eye of Omniscience witnesses the sufferings of such a soul. But on the other hand, when a man strives after what is pure and lofty in action ; when he endeavors to do to others as he would have others do to him, and discharges his obligations from the highest of motives, there is a satisfaction and happiness enjoyed that is indescribable. Is proof required of what I say? Have you my hearer, not known men—poor rich men, who never had a single hour of unbroken contentment, and whose great riches were a source of constant trouble? In hoarding up their miserly gains, they lost their reputation among men, which no amount of subsequent generosity

could redeem. Such men will tell you that they were immeasurably happier, when working from day to day for a mere livelihood, than when surrounded with all the luxuries and adornments of wealth.

II. To its possessor a good name is not only a constant source of happiness, but in spite of exceptions, it procures the favor and honor of the world. This is only secondary to the former. "Loving favor is better than silver and gold." When a man is a by-word in a community, and his name a synonyme for all that is mean, unmanly, cruel and avaricious, he had better be in his grave. When men by prevarication, dissimulation, fraud and open profligacy, separate themselves from respectable society and forfeit the confidence of their friends, what is there worth the living for? Can any condition be more miserable? It is the Almighty's payment and punishment for violation of sacred obligations—the just recompense of a life of selfishness and treachery! Bad as society is, it has not fallen so low as to honor men who dishonor their Maker. "God's mill grinds slow but sure;" and when a man has for a life-time gone in the face of honesty and integrity and sacrificed every generous emotion upon the altar of Mammon, and ran roughshod over his weaker brethren, what can he expect but the execration of his fellows? There are men in every community whose riches and position are far from enviable, in view of the methods adopted to acquire them. Possibly such men are unconscious of what public opinion is in reference to their gains and gettings; for it is one of the indirect evils of wealth, that it blinds men to moral distinctions, and in proportion fills them with inordinate conceit of their own importance and reputation. There is a man for example, who is reckoned rich and correspondingly happy (as the

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world says)—beyond the ordinary run of mortals. He has retired from business, lives in a palace, and drives his carriage. But he made his money by hard grinding of the poor. He did not scruple to loan his money at twenty-five per cent. interest, when necessity drove some unfortunate farmer to this last resort of putting off the evil day, until at last his land and all, fell into the hands of the unscrupulous usurer. Which reputation is to be preferred? Most assuredly that of the poor penniless vagrant, cast out of home and land, rather than the hard driving speculator and grasping millionaire, whose name and memory perish at the close of life. Here is another man who has secured a high position in the State, not by straightforward, manly adherence to principle, but by a pliant accommodating expediency; a flattering of this and that party in power, and a ready acquiescence in any scheme that might possibly conduce to his personal elevation and advancement. The position has been gained, but men despise the crooked policy used to secure it, and stigmatize him as a time-server and political trickster;—as one who regards life as a game, the sweepstakes falling to the "wiliest" and "wiriest" calculator. There is no tie binding such men to their race. Even those who are amazed at their success, despise their character. A good name is thus to be coveted, inasmuch as it increases our enjoyment. Wealth alone cannot procure it, but honorable conduct sooner or later will. The favor of our fellow men is not so worthless as some would have us believe. To despise public opinion is foolish. To live in a community without the stimulus of approval is painful. Differences in minor matters, do not alienate those whose opinion is of any value. Nor is it necessary, in order to secure this good name, that one should trim and square

his sails to meet every gust of popular favor. It only demands a conscientious, faithful adherence to duty, loyalty to heaven, and love to man. Such a life has in it all the elements of present happiness and is heir to nobler rewards hereafter.

III. A good name is in itself the best kind of capital. When merchants want servants or partners, they do not always seek out the sons of rich men, who can offer money as a consideration for position in the mercantile world. They prefer those who have a stainless, virtuous record—who are known for their thrift, their industry and fidelity, and who have nothing to advance them in life but sterling principle and inflexible honesty. Such a character makes friends and secures advantages which no amount of riches can command. The word of such a man is worth more than the endorsement of a millionaire.

We close this discourse by two remarks. The one is, that those who have not succeeded in life, like their neighbors, because they have not adopted the crooked policy, which in their case has ensured success, have the satisfaction of a good name and a good conscience. The other is, that if a good name is so precious we ought not only to seek after it ourselves, but take care of our neighbor's.

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"I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins."—Isaiah xlii, 25.

"I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and as a cloud thy sins; return unto me; for I have redeemed thee."—Isaiah xliv, 22.

In these verses the anxiety of the Almighty for the restoration of sinners is strikingly presented. The strongest elements of human affection are faint and feeble, compared with the deep yearnings of the Divine mind after his lost and erring children. It would seem as if the happiness of the infinite Jehovah was incomplete apart from their presence. Like the sobs and wailings of the bereaved and broken-hearted mother, over some profligate child, that has wandered from home and purity, so are these entreaties, intensely human yet divine, which spring up in the breast of the Almighty. And lest there should be any doubt or fear on the part of the sinner, and in order to remove every possible excuse that stands in the way of his acceptance of God's love, there is the solemn assurance of a full and free pardon to every penitent soul. It is not, return unto me and we will adjust the terms of mercy and reconciliation; return unto me and I will exercise the utmost clemency, consistent with my holiness and justice:

return unto me, and upon evidence of future reformation, I will cancel former sins and receive you into my favor ;— but, with a voice tremulous with emotion and with open arms to take the lost ones back again, the Almighty cries : “ I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgression for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins. I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and as a cloud thy sins : return unto me ; for I have redeemed thee.”

These words, occurring in the very heart of the Old Testament prophecies, teach us that the salvation of men was from eternity, the supreme object of the divine purposes. We are too much accustomed to regard the Old and New Testaments as two entirely different books. In the one we expect to find justice and holiness, and those attributes of vengeance which constitute, if we may so speak, the sterner aspects of the Divine character ; in the other, all those gentler traits of love and sympathy, condescension and compassion which cluster around the cross of Calvary. But there is no ground for such a conception of the Bible. The sublimest exhibitions of love are nowhere more frequent than in the old Testament, and not even after the advent of Christ into the world, do we find clearer annunciations of the Divine method of pardon. In keeping with that highly figurative and striking mode of speech that characterises the Hebrew Bards, there is an affluence of imagery and a beauty of illustration, not elsewhere found within the folds of inspiration. The highest efforts of their consecrated genius, are directed to reveal the overflowing love of God. Such a passage is our text. I have blotted out, *as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and as a cloud thy sins.*”

Let me, then, in order to magnify the goodness of God in salvation, call your attention :

1. To the nature of sin as described in the text. The exceeding sinfulness of sin is exhibited in Scripture, under a variety of striking illustrations. Those conversant with the sin-offering of the Jewish economy, will easily call up the earliest, and perhaps the most vivid picture of the heinousness and hideousness of sin, found within the sacred volume. "The slaughtered animal, foul with dust and blood—its throat gashed across, its entrails laid open, and steaming in its impurity to the sun, as it awaited the consuming fire, amid the uncleanness of ashes outside the camp—a vile and horrid thing, which no one could see without contracting defilement," was intended to teach the Jew first, and after him all mankind, what sin is in the estimate of a Holy God, and the infinite value of the sacrifice necessary to its removal. In this passage it is spoken of as a cloud—a *thick cloud*. The cloud is dark and lowering—it fills the air with gloom—it shuts out the light and beauty and splendour of the sun, and spreads an atmosphere of melancholy on all created objects. The cloud spoken of in the text, is not one of those fleecy, floating clouds, that is momentarily eclipsed by the sun, and is as speedily dispersed and scattered;—but a dense, compact mass. It is the cloud that precedes the thunder storm, and fills the mind with thoughts of destruction on the land and disaster and shipwreck out at sea. And finally, such a cloud interposes between the heavens and the earth, veiling the inner firmament and shutting out of view the higher world.

Now it is not difficult to understand the figure, as appropriately presenting the horrible nature and effects of

sin. Our sins, like the cloud, are dark and lowering. They have filled the world with gloom and sorrow. They banish every joy, and poison every pleasure. They hide from us the light and radiance of that glorious sun, whose beams are intended to cheer our pathway and brighten our existence. Like the thick clouds spoken of by the Prophet, they are a dense, compact, impenetrable mass. They are not only numerous as the sand by the sea shore, or the stars in the heavens, but they are hideous and revolting. And just as these dark, sombre clouds separate the higher from the lower firmament, so our sins interpose between us and God. "Your iniquities," saith the Prophet, "have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you that he will not hear." The way to the throne of grace is obstructed, and a barrier erected, forbidding all communication between God and man.

The latter is, I imagine, the leading thought in the Prophet's mind. The cloud is so dense and impenetrable, that the whole heavens are wrapt in intensest darkness, Such dense clouds are but seldom seen in our climate. A really dark night only occurs twice or thrice a year. There are fogs and moonless and starless nights, but to wrap the earth in a sepulchral cloud, there is needed not simply the lower vapory firmament which conceals the stars, but another expanse of clouds, miles above the lower, which makes the darkness a darkness to be felt. In such a night danger surrounds the traveller; the silence of death broods over the world. So says the Prophet. Sin, like a dark funereal pall, has veiled the inner heavens. The angel of death hovers over the scene—the herald and har-binger of coming wrath.

The mass of men have no conception of what sin

really is, else the remedy provided in the gospel, and the free offer of pardon would gladly be accepted. All men have *some knowledge of sin*, because all men have moral natures. Right and wrong are not accidents of humanity. But the common ideas of sin,—such as are entertained by unconverted men, are false and unscriptural. Some regard it as merely the violation of arbitrary law; and as a law may be either good or bad according to circumstances, the violation of God's law, which they theoretically ignore and practically deny, seems a very small matter. Others regard it as the cause of many calamities—or as philosophic skepticism would say, as something that disturbs the harmony of the universe and the relations of man to man. Viewed in this light, sin is to be lamented and avoided as much as possible. It is expedient for one's own interests and to secure the good opinion of society, that a sort of compulsory virtue should be practiced. and the more flagrant crimes should be shunned. But beyond this they do not go. The declaration of the Prophet, "Your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear," is a language they cannot understand.

Now, the soul, savingly enlightened by the Holy Spirit, regards sin as an infinite evil, deserving of infinite punishment. It is opposition to and apostacy from God:—a God, who as sovereign of the world and ruler of the universe, demands and deserves the love and confidence of every creature;—a God who, in the exercise of wondrous love, has provided pardon and reconciliation for rebellious man. It is sin that resists the Holy Spirit and the purposes of redeeming love. It has debased and deteriorated everything that has in any measure withstood the fall. Its consequences are penal. Death has come by sin and every conceivable

curse, including banishment from God's presence, and endless torment in the future state. Such a conception of sin, prepares us to welcome the announcement of my text: "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and as a cloud thy sins; return unto me, for I have redeemed thee."

II. Consider the nature of the pardon. It is full, gratuitous, free forgiveness. "I have blotted," or wiped out, *made to vanish*, as a thick cloud thy transgressions." In similiar words the prophet Micah says:—"Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? He retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy. He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities; and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea." The meaning is, that on the part of God, there will be entire forgetfulness of the sinner's wrongs. As a debt is cancelled and blotted out from the ledger, so will God cancel the debt of sin. As the dead body is cast into the ocean, and borne down many fathoms, until it finds a grave, where human eye has never penetrated, so will God effectually conceal and bury out of sight the transgressions of his people. *I have blotted them out*, he says. The deed is done—the pardon is secured.

Such a method of pardon is just what we should expect from the character of the Almighty—instantaneous, complete, final. He pardons with o'erflowing love. His nature and his ways are as far removed from ours as the heavens are high above the earth. He is not only willing to pardon, but his heart throbs with tenderness, when he sees the sinner afar off returning home. No mention is made of past ingratitude, and no reference to his career of

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crime. There is nothing to dim the joy that abounds in the family of saints. When the tide is at the ebb, you may write upon the sand, but when the waters flow in again the inscription is effaced as if it never had been written. And so in like manner, when the blood of the cross passes over the sentence of condemnation written by the law of God upon the sinner's conscience, not a line remains. The heavens black with clouds, and charged with the vials of God's fury, are lit up with smiles of mercy, and the voice of hope from the Eternal, calms the fears of the despairing soul. When God created the world, he said "Let there be light," and instantaneously there was light, not by streaks as those that usher in the dawn of day, but by the full splendour of the noon-day sun. And so when God absolves the sinner from his guilt and restores him to the friendship of his Maker, it is not by a gradual process extending over years, but by the act of a moment. Omnipotence needs no long delays nor gradual steps. There is no necessity why the sinner should be kept in long suspense as to the final issue, nor is pardon measured out with a stinted and reluctant hand. All God's actions, like his nature, are generous and royal. "The gifts of God are without repentance."

Men's ideas of God's willingness to forgive sin are in many cases unscriptural. They regard him as the mere executioner of law--as clothed with majesty and all that is terrible to guilty sinners, but destitute of everything that is attractive and winsome. Nay, is he not regarded by some, as taking absolute pleasure in the destruction of the impenitent, just as we may conceive of the uncivilized barbarian exulting over the body of his victim when it lies cold in death! Such views of the Almighty are the crea-

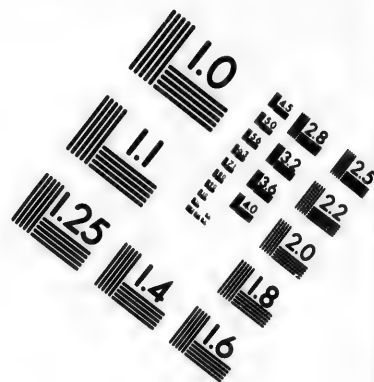
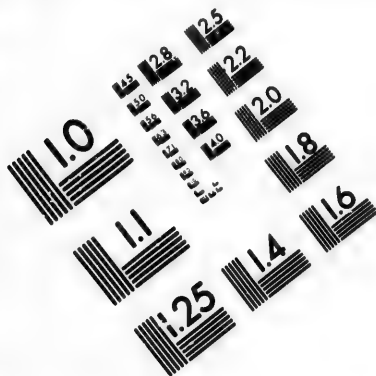
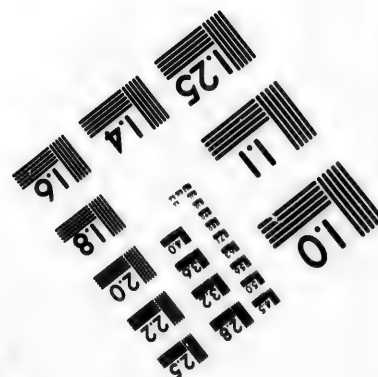
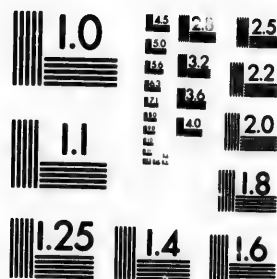


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tion of men's own wicked and revengeful hearts. They represent what their own conduct would be in similar circumstances, and what it is, day after day, in their dealings with their fellow men. Because they are unforgiving—so think they is the Almighty. Because they regard it as manly to harbor feelings of revenge and cruelty, so they imagine it is with the Almighty. Because they delight in the calamities of others, so think they does the Almighty. Far otherwise says the text. “I, even I, am he that blot-teth out thy transgressions for mine own name's sake, and will not remember thy sins.” There is no limit to the love of God. To the very last he yearns over sinners and longs for their salvation.

III. Notice the grounds of pardon. It is not because of any right or claim found in the creature. It is not because man deserves pardon, nor because God could not punish, but simply “for his own name's sake;”—to increase the glory of the Divine character in the salvation of men, and magnify his wondrous grace. No answer can be given to the question, why God should ever entertain love for guilty humanity, but the words of the text—“*for mine own name's sake.*” The pardon cannot be purchased. We must approach the mercy seat with the cry upon our lips, “for thine own name's sake, pardon mine iniquity for it is very great.” If the merits of Jesus Christ do not avail the sinner, nothing can. Atonement has been made for the transgressors. The thick cloud has been blotted out—our sins have been cast into the depth of the sea—reconciliation has been made between justice and holiness. The debt has been paid—the prisoner acquitted—the prison doors thrown open for his freedom. “I have redeemed thee.” You are henceforth mine. With my blood I have

ransomed you from the slavery and consequences of sin. My groans, my agonies, my death, have effaced for ever the stains of guilt.

It is not for the criminal to dictate terms or choose the method of acquittal. Sufficient that the pardon is put into his hands, with every evidence of its reality. The man who quarrels with his Sovereign, because the royal clemency has been exercised on other grounds than he expected or desired, deserves no pardon. Men do not act thus regarding the pardon of common crimes. But is not this one great reason, why men object to God's method of pardon, and are so slow to avail themselves of the offers of free grace. They cannot realize the possibility that such marvellous love, should be shown to guilty man. Measuring the Divine by the narrow and limited affection of the finite, they are staggered as they read the simple story of the Saviour's life and death. They cannot understand what grandeur attaches to an act prompted by no selfish consideration, but having its rise in the sovereign mercy and love of God. "Not for you sake, O sinner,—not because of any intrinsic merits you possess,—not because you do not the rather deserve eternal condemnation, but for mine own name's sake, will I blot out thy transgression and will not remember thy sins."

"Not what I feel or do,
Can give me peace with God;
Not all my prayers and sighs and tears,
Can bear my awful load.

"Thy work alone, O Christ,
Can ease this weight of sin:
Thy blood alone, O Lamb of God,
Can give me peace within."

IV, and finally. Listen to the cry of Divine love as

expressed in the words, "Return unto me for I have redeemed thee." The invitation is based upon the fact that redemption has been finished. There is nothing now to fear. Fury dwells not with the Almighty; anger and resentment have no place in his heart. Love has conquered and now invites the sinner to return. *It is the cry of earnestness.* It is no mere sentimental expression of affection, but speaking after the manner of men, it is rather the cry of despair. God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked—rather far would he that all should come unto him and live. And how can the Divine being be otherwise than in earnest, when he remembers the price paid for redemption, and the eternal retribution that must of necessity follow indifference and unconcern? Return, O sinner, or at your peril wander on! Remember that over the brink of that rugged precipice, there yawns the pit of despair. Return! for beyond these smooth and glassy waters, there are whirlpools and eddies, that ring out the death knell of the drowning. Return! for the storm fiend rides through the forest, and the blast of the simoon will smite thee to the earth. Return! ere mercy ceases to plead, and judgment begins! *It is the voice of reason.* Surely in view of what has been done for you, O wandering, homeless child of misery, God will not call in vain. Where can the returning penitent prodigal find sweeter rest, than on the bosom of the parent? Where shall protection be found and every want supplied, but under the parental roof? Whose heart is most likely to forgive, but that which has been mostly deeply wounded? Return! why vainly search for happiness in human channels, when the fountain of God's love contains inexhaustible provision, for every new desire of the immortal soul?

"The world can never give
The bliss for which we sigh;
'Tis not the whole of life to live,
Nor yet of death to die."

It is the cry of the present moment. Return now. Tomorrow may be too late. Mercy may have ceased her offers and the day of grace have passed. Long has the angel of love bended over you, and the Saviour sought admission to your heart. It is the voice of the Beloved, who says: "Open to me, my sister, my love, my undefiled; for my head is filled with dew, and my locks with the drops of the night." Beware, lest your apathy and delay lead to his withdrawal. Then in the agony of unavailing despair you will cry: "I sought him, but I could not find him; I called him, but he gave me no answer."

Such language, and the solemn truths implied, should come home with power to such as have hitherto withstood the appeals of mercy. Would that you could but realize the message as coming from God himself,—that you could see his heart, so full of tenderness and pity! If such words do not move you, I know not what will. Further effort seems useless. Jehovah himself, with reverence be it said, can use no stronger argument than the fact of redemption. Sin has been blotted out. The dark cloud that eclipsed the heavens and hid the sun has been parted, and now the atmosphere is pure and serene, and the sun of righteousness shines with undimmed splendour. All obstacles to communion between man and his Maker have been withdrawn. The flaming sword of justice has returned to its scabbard; violated law has received full satisfaction; Christ has suffered that the guilty may go free. "Ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness and dark-

ness and tempest. But ye are come unto Mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, and to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaketh better things than that of Abel. See, then, that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not, who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from Heaven."

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"And the angel which I saw stand upon the sea and upon the earth lifted up his hand to heaven, and swore by him that liveth for ever and ever, who created heaven and the things that therein are, and the earth, and the things that therein are, and the sea and the things which are therein, that there should be time no longer."—Revelations x, 5-6.

"We take no note of time but from its loss.
To give it then a tongue is wise in man."

The experience of men in every age of the world testifies to the truth of the poet's words. Hour follows hour, days, months and years glide past in rapid succession, but we mark not the solemn lessons they are intended to convey. Reason and revelation are alike clear, as regards the duty of devoting certain periods of life to the work of self-examination. To place in review before the bar of conscience the thoughts and actions of the past, and arrive at some criterion of our state in the sight of God, is eminently wise and prudent. Such a season is the present. Another cycle of time has fled, and been added to the ages of eternity. The mariner when out on the ocean, drops his fathoming line, in order to calculate his distance from the desired haven, and what progress he has made in the voyage. In like manner it becomes us, voyagers towards

the unexplored realities of eternity, to understand our position, by the unerring standard of God's word. It is well to enquire whether during the year any new principles have been developed, any greater longings for purer enjoyments than the transitoriness of earth affords, and any definite progress in the way that leads to life everlasting. On every side we are startled by thunder peals of Providence,—called day after day to witness the deathbeds of friends and acquaintances, and part from those we love. The voice of wisdom is calling to a slumbering world to awake from spiritual torpor. The last sands are fading in the glass. Nature dismantled of her foliage, in her cheerless wintry garb—the trees all bleak and bald—is testifying to a similar decay that is constantly going on in man's physical constitution, and pointing to the grave, the last resting place of humanity.

The words before us form part of that wonderful revelation made to Saint John in Patmos. From stage to stage he is carried upon the wings of a sanctified imagination, to the final consummation of all things. Angel after angel has passed before his awe-struck vision and given forth their respective proclamations. He has seen the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end of days ; the seven golden candlesticks in the hand of one like unto the Son of man, whose hair was white as wool, whose eyes were like flaming fire, whose feet were like flames, and whose voice was as the sound of many waters. He has listened to the recorded doom of the seven churches of Asia. He has beheld the great white throne with its encircling rainbow, and the four and twenty elders, arrayed in white, and wearing golden crowns. He has seen and heard the lightnings and thunderings flashing and re-

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verberating through the vault of heaven, and listened to the song of the redeemed, as in unison with the harpers by the sea of glass, they cry out, "Thou art worthy O Lord, to receive glory, honor and praise ; Thou art worthy to take the book and to open the seals thereof, for Thou was't slain and hast redeemed us to God, by thy blood." He has beheld the pale horse and his rider, death, with hell following in the rear, and heard the loud cries of long since martyred saints from under the altar, as they cry for vengeance upon the persecutors of his church and people. And now finally, appear the precursors of the earth's destruction. The stars of heaven fall, as a fig tree casts forth her untimely figs, the heavens depart as a scroll, and finally, a mighty angel enveloped in clouds descends from heaven, and planting one foot upon the sea and another upon the earth, lifts up his hand, and invoking the eternal God, proclaims that there should be time no longer.

A period is at hand then, when all the present system of material nature shall be dissolved, and give place to a new heaven and a new earth, "wherein dwelleth righteousness." The present dispensation of God's moral government shall end, and righteous retribution be awarded every sinner. Scripture, in language most sublime and striking, describes the resurrection morn and the transactions of the judgment day. It tells us that the sun in high heavens shall stagger and fall back into chaos ; that the rainbow, bow of hope, and "ribb'd with the native hues of heavenly truth," shall change its tints and sink in fire ; that the gentle moon shall grow dark and sink in utter gloom ; that the twinkling stars shall fall from their lofty watch-towers like drunken men ; that the heavens shall be

illumined like a sheet of fire ; that the fowls of heaven shall flutter on weary wings, anxious yet afraid to light upon the scorched and burning earth, and that nature from her lowest foundations, shall shake and totter, while the slumbering volcanoes of ages burst forth in fury and engulf the entire creation. It further tells us of a great white throne and Christ the judge ; of that awful day of reckoning, a day by scoffers, disbelieved, by sinners dreaded, by the righteous welcomed ; that it shall come as a thief in the night, suddenly and unexpectedly, with no signs of coming dissolution and no symptoms of a change—the earth fair and beauteous as on the morning of Sodom's destruction ;—that the merchant shall be busy at his desk, the minister in his study, the debauchee groaning under the fatigue of the last night's revelry, the miser counting his heaps of gold, the virgin preparing for the dance or for the marriage altar, the statesman discussing the claims of empires and questions of finance, the man of science engaged in his researches, and the hero leading forth to the battle-field his armies for victory or death. In a word, all things shall be as now, no seeming change at hand, and all things betokening many days of future good. Then thus unexpectedly :

“ Revealed in flaming fire,
The Angel of God appearing, in stature vast,
Blazing and lifting up his hand on high—
By him that lives forever, swears that time
Shall be no more.”

Although the word of God throughout assumes the destruction of the material globe, much practical skepticism exists in regard to it. Accustomed to look upon the alternations of day and night, summer and winter, heat and cold, as fixed and established beyond the possibility

of change, we hardly all at once realise such a complete reversal of the order of nature. And yet why should men stagger at such an announcement? Geology tells us of successive changes in material forms and substances, almost as wonderful as the destruction of a world. What is now dry land, was covered with water centuries ago. What now are seas and rivers, may have been the solid earth. Islands, through volcanic agencies have been upheaved from the bed of ocean. Earthquakes entombing cities and villages, and burning mountains scattering their torrents of lava, terrify the inhabitants of the European continent at the present day, and indicate the sources of still greater changes, within the limits of the present generation. We speak of the everlasting hills, the solid rocks and the firm foundations of the universe, whereas the evidences are abundant that the world is growing old, and that within her secret places the materials are prepared, that shall eventually reduce to nothingness the grandeur and the glory of this wondrous fabric. "Of old says the Psalmist, hast thou laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of thy hands. They shall perish but thou shalt endure; Yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment, as a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed."

What a scene shall earth present, and what a still more awful scene, when assembled thousands meet before the bar of judgment. The ocean has been hushed to silence, and its waves are at rest forever. At the voice of the trumpet the graves are opened, and the dead of every age and nation obey the summons. The mouldering bones and dust of centuries start to life; the infant of a span length, the youth of promise, the man of strength, the

bowed-down sire—all, all, spring forth to immortality, for death itself has died. There they stand in the presence of the Lamb. Dread silence pervades the courts of heaven—when lo! the Son of Man, arrayed in terrible majesty, takes his seat upon the throne, the sceptre of justice in his hand, and the book of remembrance before his searching gaze. The sinner's doom is fixed, and the saints' inheritance proclaimed, and as he speaks,

“Man, angel, devil, stand
And listen. The spheres stand still, and every star
Stands still and listens; and every particle
Remotest in the womb of nature, stands,
Bending to hear--devotional and still.
Forthwith the wicked are driven within
The gateless walls of hell, to spend a long
Eternity of agony and misery. The righteous
On chariot of fire, surrounded by bands of angels
Shall pierce yon cloudless sky,
And dwell forever with the Prince of Peace.”

It matters very little to us when time shall end. Science presumes to tell us the age of the world, but she wisely hesitates to predict the time of its dissolution. There is no data to help us even to an approximation of the day and hour. It is well that it is so. The Divine Being intends that the simple knowledge of the fact should stimulate us in the discharge of present duty and preparation for that solemn crisis. The day of our death is to each of us the end of time, and the beginning of eternity. Of this we may rest assured, that it will not be long until it is said of many who hear me: “Time for you is no longer—this year thou shalt surely die.” During the year now closed, many have passed away from the church militant on earth to the church triumphant in glory. No clouds of sin and sorrow obstruct their vision, but Christ and his love are now their themes of endless admiration and delight.

As in the dead of night, the vessel strikes the rock and founders, without a human soul escaping to relate the horrors of the hour, so do generations pass away, leaving behind them but little to mark their lives. Where are the Pharaohs of Egyptian antiquity—the builders of those pyramids that even yet astound by their proportions? Where the kings and rulers of Bible times? Where the emperors and heroes of Greece and Rome whose names were once the terror and admiration of the world; where the poets and singers of a hoary past, whose strains even yet fall subduedly upon the ear—echoes of an age so remote as almost to make us doubt its reality? Where those old Prophets who in rapt vision, heard the voice of God and revealed his will in tongues of fire? All gone! Like the leaves of the past summer, that for a little strewed the pathway of the forest, and connected the autumn and winter months, but are now swept away by the hurricane's blast, and lost amid the decaying dust—so are these actors upon the page of history. Many of them occupied prominent places; their deeds are still the theme of wonder; men come and pause reverently over their graves, if indeed their graves can be identified—but undistinguished from the great mass of humanity, it is at last only recorded of them "*that they died.*"

If it is difficult to realize the close of the present dispensation, it is not less difficult for us to grasp the full meaning of eternity. Who can express what momentous issues hang upon that single word? Occupying, as we do, but a point in space and a moment of duration, like motes in the sunbeam and animalcules in the drops of water, is it wonderful that we are inadequate to form any conception of eternity? Count up, if you can, the au-

tumna! leaves that lie scattered over ten thousand forests and multiply them a million times ; add to this aggregate the starry host of heaven, suns and systems with the nebulae and fire mist which skirt the boundaries of immensity ; shiver these glorious orbs into atoms, and bruise them into the finest dust ; then look out upon the ocean and count the drops of water that compose the Atlantic and Pacific ; gather up the grains of sand that cover the surface of the globe, and when you have summed them up in one, you have but a transient flash of time, contrasted with the measureless duration of eternity.

If, then, this present scene shall soon end, and a measureless eternity follow, in which we are to live and act, enjoy or suffer, what should be our conduct in view of the great unknown future ? I am not addressing men who deny the existence of a future state, and fondly dream that the present world is the end of all existence, death a delusion and the judgment day a fable. Christian men and women believe that time is but the prelude of eternity, that life is but the dawn of a glorious or miserable hereafter, and that upon the actions of the present hang the fearful issues of the future. If you were assured then, that before this year closed—and the thing is not impossible—you should suddenly be called to the bar of the Eternal, how would you act ? Would you spend the few remaining moments of existence, in vain regrets and melancholy musings over opportunities of usefulness and seasons of privilege neglected, and not rather in earnest concern and preparation for the future ? The greatest of all crimes is, that men do not consider their latter end. For a man hopelessly to destroy himself, nothing more is needed than simply indifference. If he can bring himself to believe that the realities of a

coming judgment are after all mere abstractions, it is enough. Once in the rapids of Niagara, a man need not use the oar to ensure the certainty of his going over the foaming cataract? Death by stupefaction is just as sure as by the guillotine or the gallows. The only difference is that it may take a longer time. A man does not require to plough his ground or sow seed in order to have a goodly crop of weeds; all that is requisite is simply that he do nothing—fold his hands, shut his eyes, and let nature assert her supremacy.

There are some men who regard the end of all things as a mere speculative matter on which they can exercise their ingenuity. Others, while admitting the certainty of death, act as if they would live for ever, and banish the very thought of eternity from the mind, lest it should disturb their carnal security, and awaken anxiety. Others, again, make the very uncertainty of life and certainty of death, a reason for still greater license in animal indulgence. "Time is so short," they say, and "life is so uncertain, why concern ourselves about its end?" "Let us eat, drink and be merry, for to-morrow we die,"—while others regard death as a mere fatality, like the Stoics and Epicureans of old—as some inexplicable event unknown and unimportant. Yea, even among good men, many act unwisely, if not wickedly in the prospect of death. The habit of repining at the shortness of life, and at God's dealing with them in providence, is a most common one. Instead of feeling grateful for the past, and exercising faith and hope in the future, they spend their precious hours in counting up their misfortunes and tabulating their miseries. Far otherwise should we act—as dying men; de-

voting our few remaining years to the discharge of duty and the attainment of that meekness, which becomes the sons of God and the heirs of the inheritance.

Brethren, let us not be over anxious about this world. While diligent in business and assiduous in our various employments, let us seek nobler and more lasting treasures. We are to use the world—not abuse it. The good things of earth belong to the Master—we are but the stewards of His bounty. The brevity of existence and the utter uncertainty as to when it shall close, should tax our energies to accomplish something really useful and noble for the world. At the same time, it should moderate our aspirations, and help us to estimate intelligently the value of earth's highest honors. Death is the great leveller. He ends all artificial and unreal distinctions. When the sceptre falls from the hand of the sovereign, he is nothing more than the poorest of his subjects ; when the mighty intellect ceases to think and the heart to throb, there is but one common resting place for the decaying temple.

“ Death lays his icy hands on kings,
Sceptre and crown
Must tumble down,
And in the dust be equal made,
With the poor crooked scythe and spade.
All heads must come
To the cold tomb ;
Only the actions of the just
Smell sweet, and blossom in the dust.”

Let us be patient and hopeful under the calamities of life. Do not look at the clouds over much. There is a bright light beyond the clouds, if we could but pierce the darkness. If this world is a vale of tears, it also has many good things to cheer and comfort. Cultivate a happy contented spirit during the coming year. Endeavor

to make life more illustrious, or at least useful, and less commonplace than it has been in the past. Improve every talent. Consecrate every faculty to the noblest aims. Sow the seeds of love and virtue over the face of society, and the fruit shall in after years be seen, when you sleep in death. Above all, anticipate joyfully the unspeakable blessedness of the sinless future, where desires and aspirations, now unsatisfied, shall be fully met. There is a deathless world, where all live again; where sickness and old age never enter; where the brow is never furrowed, and the limbs are never weary; where an existence is begun, compared with which, the most finished life on earth is but the feebleness and foolishness of childhood:—

“All, all on earth is shallow, all beyond is substance;
This is the land of being, the dim dawn,
The twilight of our day, the Vestibule.
Strong death alone can heave the massy bar
And make us embryos of existence free.”

In this same Book of Revelation we read of the cry of the martyred saints under the altar—“How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?” *It is the language of complaint. How long? Why not? Evil prevails and cruelty runs riot. Creation groans under the curse. Death on the pale horse rides as conqueror. Humanity moans like the deep murmur of the ocean, when convulsed by storm the waves dash and rebound against the rocky shore. It is the language of submission and hope. There must be an end. There is some good reason why he forbears. He knows all and permits all. Faith, though staggered, is not dead. The eye, though dim with looking, is not closed. It is the language of enquiry. When? How many*

years shall yet elapse? How much more bloodshed and cruelty shall the earth witness? When shall the curtain fall and the sun for ever set upon the battle-field, where heaven and hell contend for the mastery? Is the fulfilment of prophecy yet far distant, when the Dragon shall be slain, and Babylon sink to rise no more? Has not the world grown old enough in wickedness to lead us to expect the end? To all such enquiries, says John:—"And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband; and I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away." Then shall be realized the words of the poet:

"Lord of all power, when thou art there alone,
 On thy eternal fiery-wheeled throne;
 When thou art there in thy presiding state
 Wide-sceptred monarch, o'er the realm of doom;
 When from the sea depths, from earth's darkest womb,
 The dead of all the ages round thee vault;
 And when the tribes of wickedness are strewn
 Like forest leaves in the autumn of thine ire:
 Faithful and true! thou still wilt save thine own!
 The saints shall dwell within the unharmed fire,
 Each white robe spotless—blooming every palm.

Yes, mid yon angry and destroying signs,
 O'er us the rainbow of thy mercy shines;
 We hail, we bless the covenant of its beam,
 Almighty to revenge, almighty to redeem!"

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